

THE STORY OF
A LOG-HOUSE
■■■
MARY FRANCES OUTRAM





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THE STORY OF A LOG HOUSE

by

Mary Frances Outram

with three illustrations

by Lancelot Speed

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THE STORY OF A LOG-HOUSE

‘ EXCEPT

*the Lord build the house,
they labour in vain that build it:*

EXCEPT

*the Lord keep the city,
the watchman waketh but in vain.’*

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The Story of a Log-House

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

‘**W**HAT a jolly little house it looks, now that it’s finished! I wonder what Kitty will think of it when she comes. I must write and tell her I’m all ready for her now.’

The speaker was a young settler, tall and muscular, with a pleasant, sunburnt face, which now flushed with pride as he uttered these words to himself.

He was seated alone, on a newly-hewn log, on the edge of a wood far away in a distant part of North America. As his eyes rested on the little log-house, that stood, bare and new, in the midst of the scattered chips and rough blocks of wood that strewed the ground, his thoughts flew back to the old country, and long-forgotten words rose almost involuntarily to his lips.

‘Except the Lord build the house, they labour

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in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.'

'Why, I don't believe I've said that verse for—let me see, can it be nigh on fifteen years?'

He lit his pipe, and as he lazily watched the rings of smoke sail away in the soft evening air he gave himself up to quiet reminiscences of the past.

No wonder he thought of those fifteen years with respect, for they formed more than half the short sum of his young life. They had been eventful years to him, however; and as he now let his thoughts wander back to that summer afternoon, when he, as a little fellow of ten years old, learnt that verse, and repeated it, with his hands behind his back, to his young teacher, he could hardly believe that he and that curly-haired lad were really the same person. Everything seemed so changed.

And yet how vividly the scene rose before his eyes.

The familiar village school, with its uneven brick floor, and the rough wooden benches—all hacked and battered by the knives and heels of many generations of scholars. The door left open to let in the air on that hot summer day, and the

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white roses that nodded their heads in a lazy, comfortable fashion as they peeped in, round the door-post, at the hot little scholars. He remembered that from his seat he could just see the field in which Farmer Bennett's young colt was pastured, and the interest with which he had watched him gallop along the side of the hedge, to keep near the doctor's gig, as it passed up the road. He could almost feel Miss Maynard's hand pat him on the shoulder, and hear her soft voice say: 'Now, Jack, your wits are wool-gathering, I think. Turn round, and look at what I have brought to show you.'

He pictured to himself again the beautiful large text which she was holding up before her little class. It was the verse he had just repeated, printed in nice clear letters that you could feel with your fingers as well as see with your eyes, they were so boldly stamped upon the card. The letters were in silver, and forget-me-nots with wide-open bright blue eyes were painted in a little tangled bunch just behind the 'E' of 'Except'; while sprays of them drooped in delicate gracefulness over the words, and twined about through some of the letters. How pretty it was!

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He recalled how Miss Maynard told them that the first boy who could repeat it correctly should have it for his own, to hang up in his room at home. How the eager heads were bent forward, in their anxiety to impress the words on their memories, as Miss Maynard held it in front of them; and how disappointed Jack was when Philip Singleton stood up, and announced that he was able to say it. The card was placed so that he should not see the words, and he began. How pleased Jack was when Philip failed in the middle of the verse, and Jack himself triumphantly repeated it without a mistake, or even a hesitation.

He remembered how proud he felt when Miss Maynard said: 'The card is yours, Jack; you have fairly won it.' And then he seemed to hear her voice, with its gentle, earnest tones, trying to impress the little boys with the truth that verse was meant to teach—the utter folly and weakness of a man trying to do without God.

'Men often try to make their own plans,' he seemed to hear her say, 'and go their own ways, and leave God out of both their hearts and their lives; but oh, boys, if you leave God out of

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your lives, how can you claim a place in His kingdom?’

As the scene now came back to him, and he recalled the words, Jack moved a little uneasily on the log, and his thoughts again centred on the present.

His eyes, which had been vacantly gazing in front of him, suddenly became conscious of the fair scene before him. The western sky was all aglow with crimson clouds, and the sun was sinking quickly behind the mountains in a mist of gold. Before him lay a wide, undulating country, broken up towards the west into a countless succession of wooded hills, one behind the other, like the waves of a billowy sea. The deep blue shadows showed up their varied outlines as the setting sun just touched their crests with light.

He himself sat with his back to the limitless forest, which stretched out behind him into the ‘great lone land,’ almost untrodden by the foot of the white man: the home of the Indian and the deer, the bear and the beaver, and countless other wild denizens of the lake and wood.

The little log-house in the foreground looked very plain and very unpretentious, but a feeling

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of pride and pleasure arose in his heart as he gazed at its bare walls and shingle roof. For the first time in his life he could say, 'That is *my* house.'

Those fifteen years had seen him grow out of the curly-haired little Sunday scholar into a fine, well-developed youth, with a broad brow, and an energy that defied obstacles, and drove him from the shelter of that village home into the rush and competition of a busier, more stirring life. He got on well, being determined to rise above the level of the unambitious and less persevering lads around him, and was even able to put by a little sum to help him, when the time should come, to launch out upon a career of his own. One thing had served above all others to spur him on, and enable him to rise above every difficulty, and that was the thought of pretty Kitty Carrington, his former friend and companion at the village school. After six years' absence he returned, to find the girl he had loved and protected as a boy grown taller and sweeter and fairer than he had even pictured in his dreams, and he felt that life without Kitty would not be worth living, or prosperity worth working

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for. So he set himself to woo and win her, and when he had satisfied himself that Kitty had given her heart into his keeping he went forth, as so many have done, into the New World, to make his fortune, and get ready a home for her. For six more years he worked hard, and lived frugally, and now to-day he was the possessor of a good grant of land in the Dominion of Canada, and a tidy sum in the bank for stock and furnishing. That very day he had put the last shingle on the roof of his own house, which now stood before him a visible and accomplished fact.

‘Well, I don’t see that the Lord had much to do in the building of that house,’ he said to himself as he meditatively puffed away at his pipe, ‘nor in the shaping or making of my life either—not many plums have fallen into my mouth. It’s been work, sheer hard work, and a will that’s not turned about like a weather-cock, that’s brought me to this little home; and it’s Kitty, bless her, that’ll put the crown of happiness on the top of it all!’

Oh, Jack! consider a moment, who gave you those strong young arms and that power

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of will, and who caused those forest saplings to grow straight and tall for your use, when you had never even thought of their existence ; and, above all, who watches over Kitty for you, while you are so far away, making sunshine and peace in her heart and eyes? For she has taken God for her Master and her King, and has given herself into His keeping.

CHAPTER II

LEAVING THE OLD NEST

KITTY CARRINGTON had never known any other home than the old white-washed cottage beside the brook, with its low-thatched roof, and latticed windows framed in a sweet entanglement of honeysuckle and roses. To reach it from the highroad you had to cross the brook by a primitive little bridge, formed by one long slab of stone, and then mount the garden path, between two rows of bright, old-fashioned flowers and shrubs, all crowded together in a luxuriant mass of rich colour and far-reaching scent. Moss roses, and red and white phloxes, flanked by tall, nodding hollyhocks and sunflowers, pure white madonna lilies, and great heads of ten-week stocks, loaded with perfume, mingled with the more delicate blossoms of bright-coloured annuals. Sweet peas and mignonette ran riot, with the freedom of old-established favourites, and rich purple, yellow,

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and white pansies formed a fitting border to the wealth within.

Kitty sat on the garden seat beside the porch, with her hands folded in her lap, and her eyes dreamily gazing out across the bright tapestry of flowers; beyond the brook and the highroad, shaded by massive oaks and beeches; across the fields rejoicing in the summer sunshine away to the glow in the far west—watching where the sun dipped down towards that strange, new land where Jack was waiting for her, and to which she was so soon going.

She knew he loved to watch the sunset too, and she felt a strange kind of fellowship with the great golden ball as it disappeared every evening from her view; for she knew Jack's day had then begun, which would surely end with quiet thoughts of her as his evening also hastened to its close.

The sound of wheels made her stand up to see better down the road, and she waved her hand as a light cart came in view. Seated beside the driver was a bright, dark-eyed girl of about Kitty's own age, who waved vigorously in answer to her greeting, and jumped down from the cart almost before it had stopped opposite the stone slab. She ran

lightly up the garden path, and kissed Kitty on both cheeks with impetuous fervour, and then the two friends sat down together on the seat Kitty had just quitted.

‘Grandfather says, if you’ll be ready at seven o’clock to-morrow morning, he’ll call for you as he goes in to Bunstall; and if your brother is not going with you he says I may pack myself away among the parcels so as to see the last of you.’

Kitty’s eyes brightened. ‘I should be glad if you came, Bessy, for Jim is not able to get away. You see, it’s the big cattle-market to-morrow, and Farmer Bennett wants him to take a lot of calves to be sold. It does seem a pity that it is just the very day of my journey, but it can’t be helped. Only, I must say, I should have felt it rather lonely if I had had to start off all by myself; so I’m truly glad to have you, Bessy, if you can really come.’

‘I can’t think how you can go at all, Kitty; I think you’re just awfully brave. I should be all of a fuss and a tremble if I were going to start off for the backwoods of America all by myself, as you are and yet here I find you sitting in the garden as cool as a cucumber, though in about twelve

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'hours more you'll have started off on a journey about half round the world!'

'It does seem rather a long one,' said Kitty, laughing, 'but I think the very length of it makes me take it more quietly. I can't yet quite realise what it all means. I know I have been twenty times more flurried when I was only going to visit my aunt at Burminster. But this is something quite different, Bessy. I feel so small and feeble when I begin to think about it all that it makes me want to be quiet and still. I just feel able to rest on two things, and they seem to swallow up everything else: I'm going to Jack, and—my Father knows.'

As she softly spoke the last words she glanced at the pure white lilies waving in the evening breeze, and then up at the little nest in the honeysuckle on the cottage wall, near which a twittering family of full-fledged young sparrows were preparing to roost in a soft little line, having outgrown the cradle that had sheltered them for so long.

'I feel like those little sparrows,' she said: 'they are just beginning to learn how very big the world is; and yet every day they find their portion provided for them, and every night they

sleep quietly without any fear of what the morrow will bring.'

She looked out again towards the sun, just dipping behind the horizon, and her face grew very bright and peaceful as the verse came into her mind: 'One of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.'

'Oh, Kitty, you *are* good, and I wish I were like you; but I'm not, and that's just all about it.'

Kitty smiled as she answered: 'I don't think it's good to feel helpless and weak and small, Bessy; I think it's only very comforting when you know you can put the whole of you, just as you are, into the strong, mighty Hands of the only One who can really help you and keep you, whether here in dear, quiet Fairbrook, or out on the great, wide sea, or in the backwoods of America, as you call it.'

'Yes,' sighed Bessy; 'it's all very well, and I wish I could feel it the same way, but I should find it dreadfully difficult to be so calm about it as you are.'

'I don't think I should dare to go if I did not feel God had hold of me,' said Kitty earnestly. 'It would seem such a dreadful plunge into such a lot of new things if I did not know He would

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be with me. You see, there's my marriage too, Bessy.'

'Yes; you're above my head in that too, Kitty. Do you mean to say that it's really only because you love Jack so much that you are going to him, all by yourself, in those lonely dreary places, with nobody near you but bears and wolves—not even a cross neighbour to look in and liven you up a bit? Or is there just a little feeling that you're not wanted in there,' and Bessy jerked her head in the direction of the cottage door, 'and so you feel driven to go and try some new plan? Now tell me truly, Kitty, once for all, is it just because of Jack that you're going to bury yourself alive with him, just only because you love him?'

'Yes,' said Kitty simply; and she raised her head, and looked Bessy straight in the face, with a proud light in her eyes, and her well-shaped lips firmly pressed together, as if to defy all doubt. 'He needs me all the more because it's lonely. Besides,' she added, the determined look on her proud little face giving way to a merry smile, 'I am not sure that bears and wolves are not safer company than cross neighbours. They won't

make mischief between me and Jack, anyhow, and I expect I shall have less difficulty in keeping them outside the house! You see, Bessy, if I don't write such glowing accounts of the backwoods, that you'll surprise me one fine day by turning up there yourself with a husband of your own.'

'No, no,' laughed Bessy; 'you needn't count on that. I would not go—no, not for all the Jacks in the whole wide world!'

'Neither would I,' retorted Kitty—'that's just the point of it. I go just because there is only *one* Jack in the whole wide world for me. And as I can't do without him, and he can't do without me, that's an end of the whole matter. But, Bessy, don't think for a moment Jim wants me to go away. You know how he's always begging me to stop. But the old place is not the same to me now as when dear mother was here. Janet is so busy with the children that she does not want me to keep her company as she used to when there was only little Frank, and she does not care for me to help her in the house, so I feel I'm not needed here any longer. And when there's a home of my own waiting for me on the other side of the world I don't see why I should

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not go to it. I expect they will miss the bit of money I used to bring in with my dressmaking ; but Jim, he never would take much of it, and now he's getting such good wages with Farmer Bennett he doesn't need it as he did at first ; so I go with an easy mind as far as they are concerned.'

'Well, I must be off now, or grandfather's supper will not be ready before he comes in from putting Dobbin to bed. So good-night, and sleep well your last night in the old country.'

Bessy kissed her, and hastily drawing a parcel from her pocket she placed it on Kitty's knee, saying, 'Perhaps you'll find room to stow that away somewhere in your box. It isn't very big, and it will help to remind you of me sometimes. Oh, how I wish you weren't going, dear old Kitty ; I shall miss you dreadfully.'

And Bessy threw her arms round her friend's neck, kissed her again, and, turning to hide the rising tears, flew down the path, and across the brook, disappearing in the growing darkness of the lane.

Kitty looked affectionately after her, and, murmuring 'Dear Bessy,' untied the parcel on her knee.

It contained a little 'Bee' clock, with a nice, round white face, and a comfortable, stumpy little body, about as big as a large apple. Turning into the cottage, she displayed her present before Jim's and Janet's admiring eyes.

As they sat round the table that night at supper Jim remarked : ' I heard to-day that you're likely to have company from Fairbrook on the ship, Kitty, and I doubt it will not please you overmuch to hear who it is.'

Kitty had arranged to travel with Mrs Purcell, one of Janet's cousins, a kind, motherly woman, going out with her two children to join her husband in Quebec, but she knew of no one else in the least likely to be going.

' Who is it, Jim ?'

' One that your lad out there won't be best pleased to see, I warrant.'

' Not Philip Singleton, I hope,' said Janet ; ' I somehow can't abide that young fellow, civil-spoken though he is. I always think of a fox when I see him, he looks so sly-like to my mind, though I can't think why I should say so, for I know nothing against him, really.'

' Yes ; it is just Phil,' said Jim, and he looked

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across at Kitty to see how she took the news. Kitty was flushed with annoyance. She knew Jack would be vexed about it. They had always been rivals: as boys they had contended for the same prizes in school, and had vied with each other in all outdoor sports and games. Almost of the same age and aptitude, they were well matched, and the struggle was evenly maintained. But while Philip scored in greater quickness and brilliancy, Jack's strong will and dogged perseverance often gained the day. Both had loved Kitty Carrington; but Jack had always been her chosen champion, and latterly her accepted lover. Philip was too vain to let the world see the soreness of his heart or the wound that had been given to his pride, and laughed it off as best he could; but his speech grew more bitter than it had been before, and his ways more reckless and overbearing.

Kitty could not get over a feeling of dislike to him; and now he was to be her companion for this long voyage, and the happy meeting with Jack would be marred by his unwelcome presence.

She and Jim sat late before the fire that night talking over the past and future. Her brother

had never seemed so dear to her before as he did that evening, the last they might ever spend together.

As she knelt later at her open lattice window, with the mingled scents from the garden borne in upon her on the soft night air, hot tears came to the relief of her full heart, though she had kept up bravely all day. She thought of the happy childhood she and Jim had spent in the old cottage, of her father's early death, and her dear, gentle mother's brave fight in the hard battle of life that came afterwards; of the joy when she and Jim were able to help that dear mother as her health began to fail; of the few quiet, peaceful years when they had cared for her in return for all she had done for them. Then came Jim's marriage, and her own courtship, and, latterly, their mother's death, in peace, at eventide. And now she was going to launch out on an unknown tide, to cut adrift from all the old home anchors, and begin a new life as a young wife in a foreign land, with new cares and duties, new surroundings, and new experiences.

But it was to be with Jack! Her heart gave

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a leap of joy in spite of her tears. The weary waiting was to be over very soon now, with the ache that came from the longing desire to be with him, and to hear his voice again. She wished Phil had not been coming to spoil their meeting; but soon they would leave him far behind, and more than likely might never see him again, so she would not let that trouble her more. She looked up at the cloudless sky, sprinkled with bright stars, that seemed to look down upon her with kindly eyes, keeping watch over the earth during the hours of night, and a great peace stole into her soul. 'He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.' And He was her Keeper, and America was as near to Him as Fairbrook. A sleepy chirp came up from one of the sparrows in the honeysuckle as she rose from her knees; and she fell asleep that last night in the old home with the words on her lips, 'Ye are of more value.' 'Be not afraid.'

CHAPTER III

OUT ON THE OCEAN WAVE

IT was not a very brisk little party that sat grouped together in the sunshine on the third day after the good ship 'Numidian,' had left the Liverpool docks on her voyage across the Atlantic to Montreal.

It had been very rough and unpleasant weather, and this was the first time they had all been able to get up on deck.

Poor Mrs Purcell looked the picture of woe, with a large tartan shawl over her head and a wet pocket-handkerchief tied round her throbbing temples. Her youngest child lay on her capacious lap, with his eyes shut, and the traces of tears on his little white face. Kitty was sitting with her arm round the elder child, watching some of the men who were enjoying a game of quoits.

'Oh dear,' sighed poor Mrs Purcell, rocking herself backward and forward, with her hand

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over her aching brow, 'if I'd known it was to be like this, no mortal man would ever have persuaded me to set foot on this wretched ship.'

'No, indeed,' chimed in a young woman on her right, who was carrying a great, strong baby of about eighteen months old; "but you may be thankful your two children are old enough to want to lie still along with you. Wait till you're ill and have a baby that's as well and lively as a young cricket, and *then* you'll know what misery is! To feel you can't lift your head from your pillow, you're that sick and giddy, and to have to keep a hold, constant, on the child's clothes, or he'd be over the side, is enough to turn your hair white. Oh my, what a time I've had with him! You naughty boy!' And she shook her lively son, and gave him a kiss as a fitting punishment. 'If it hadn't been for that good Kitty of yours, who was kind enough to take him a little into her bunk, and amuse him a bit, I don't know what I'd have done.'

'Why did father tell us to come all this way on the sea, mother?' asked Polly Purcell. 'England is much nicer than 'Merica.'

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'I want to go back, mother,' wailed the sick child on Mrs Purcell's knee.

'You'll have to swim back then, there's no other way that I can see; and if you think you're fit for it, I'm not,' said Mrs Purcell rather snappishly. 'It's no use bothering and grumbling. What can't be cured must be endured; and we've six more days of it at least, unless a storm comes, and we all go to the bottom.'

Mrs Purcell forgot that it was she herself who set the example of complaining.

The game of quoits was over, and some of the men joined the little party. The frantic leaps of the lively baby proved without a doubt that one of them was 'Daddy.'

'Take the rogue,' said his tired wife; 'my arms just ache with holding of him. I don't know if it's the sea makes him stronger or me weaker, but all I can say is, he's too much of a handful for me by a long way, and I daren't let him go for a minute or he'll be at some sort of mischief.'

'He's a rare one for mischief, that he is,' said his proud young father. 'His mother's not had

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much idea of *me* for a nurse since she left me on duty with the baby while she ran out on an errand, and when she came back, before ever she'd shut the door, she nigh frightened me out of my five senses, she gave such a roar; and when I looked round sharp like, for I'd forgotten the baby, he bein', as I thought, safe asleep on the couch, what should I see but her snatching the ink-bottle out of the little dear's hands—he standing up sensible like on the couch, and using the ink-bottle for a feeding cup! I don't know how much he might ha' swallowed, but there warn't much left in the bottle, I can tell you. His face *were* a sight, and his hands; and he'd spilled great black streams all over his new pinny and the tablecloth! And he so quiet like. Oh, you are a rum un, you little nigger! Who spilt the ink, you rascal?'

The baby gave a yell of delight and satisfaction, and danced up and down in a sort of war-dance on his father's knee; while his mother shook her fist at him in pretended wrath, which only made the baby dance the harder.

'What a happy family, to be sure,' said a new voice.

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Kitty looked up, and saw Philip Singleton standing beside her.

‘Have you room for one more, or have you forgotten all your old friends already, Kitty?’

Without waiting for an answer, Philip sat down on a coil of rope beside her, and began inquiring how she had got on the last few days. He condoled with Mrs Purcell, joked with the baby’s mother, told a fairy story to little Polly, and made himself so generally pleasant and unobjectionable that Kitty began to think she had been too hard on him, and that perhaps, after all, he would not be such a troublesome fellow-traveller as she had imagined and feared.

The next few days saw the sea smooth like glass, and the sky an unbroken sheet of blue. Mrs Purcell’s spirits revived, until she was even heard to say that she believed she would be quite sorry to leave the ship, if only it might always be as calm as this. Appetites improved enormously, and it seemed as if everyone was trying to make up for the lost days. They played games, and read books, and even got up a concert one night among themselves, when Kitty distinguished herself by her singing ; for she had a good voice,

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and knew how to use it. She also recited a little dialogue with Polly Purcell, which was highly appreciated by her audience.

That evening, as Kitty was lingering for a few minutes on deck, watching the moonlight dance on the water, and trying to cool her cheeks after the hot concert, she saw someone approach and lean over the rail beside her. It was Philip.

She instinctively drew a little farther away, but he appeared not to see it.

‘What a lovely voice you’ve got, Kitty,’ he said ; ‘it is just ringing in my ears still. It made me think of that evening, six Christmases ago now, when you sang so well at the opening of the new schoolroom, and I walked home with you afterwards. Don’t you remember?’

It was the evening of all others Kitty did not want to remember, for it was one of the very few occasions when she had given Philip any sort of encouragement. Jack had rather offended her by stopping so long after the concert talking to Miss Norman, the organist, and she had accepted Phil’s offer to see her home—‘Just to let Jack see she wasn’t to be trifled with,’ she said



PHILIP SAT DOWN ON A COIL OF ROPE BESIDE HER.

Out on the Ocean Wave 33

to herself. She remembered how sorry she had been when, in the middle of the walk home, Philip began to talk in a way she had never allowed anyone but Jack to do before. She remembered he had tried to kiss her at the gate, and she had run away from him up the garden path.

The very next morning Jack had come early to the cottage, looking pale and haggard, as if he had not slept, and, finding her in the garden, had poured out the tale of his love in a straightforward, manly fashion, and had asked her to be his wife.

Oh, the happy days that followed, when all the earth seemed glorified, and poor Phil's sour face was the only drawback to their joy! Jack told Kitty that he had come up to them just as they stood at the garden gate, and had gone away utterly miserable at the mere idea that Kitty was trifling with him, and he could not rest until he had made sure that he might claim her as his own.

Kitty did not want that night to be brought again to her notice when she was just on her way to become Jack's wife, and she did not answer.

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‘I think it’s a shame of Jack to ask you to banish yourself in that awfully out-of-the-way hole. I can’t understand a man being so selfish. You’re too good for that, Kitty; and, as an old friend, I advise you to talk Jack over about it, and get him to take you to some nice, lively place, not away in the backwoods, where you’ll see some life, and get the society you ought to have. You would, if I had my way about it. Jack never did understand what girls like, and now he’s been buried away so long himself I’m afraid you’ll find it rather hard to fall in with all his ideas.’

‘I’m quite satisfied with Jack, thank you,’ said Kitty coldly; ‘and he consulted with me before ever he arranged for us to live out there, so it’s *my* choice too, Philip.’

‘That’s always the way with you good women: you’re too good and unselfish with us men, and you need someone who won’t always try to make you go the way he wants, and persuade you it’s your own choice into the bargain. By the way, you’ve not seen Jack for six years, have you? I hope you won’t be disappointed in him. You know, “distance lends enchantment to the view.”’

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Kitty turned to go ; she felt too angry to trust herself to speak.

‘It’s all very well, Kitty ; you turn away from me now, but remember I used to be a friend of yours—and it was just a toss-up between me and Jack in the old days, you know. You may live to regret your choice, Kitty.’

Kitty threw a disdainful glance at him as he leant against the rails. ‘I am not in the least afraid about my choice,’ she said, ‘and in a few days I shall be proud to call myself Jack’s wife.’

And she walked away.

CHAPTER IV

A TEA-PARTY AND A WEDDING

IN spite of Mrs Purcell's assurances that she would be sorry to leave the ship, it was certainly not with regrets that at last the travellers caught sight of land and felt that their voyage would soon be over. The green trees on the banks of the St Lawrence looked so refreshing after the long days of nothing but sky and sea, and they longed to get out and walk about among the fields and woods that they passed on their way up the broad river to Quebec.

Mrs Bent was rejoicing at the thought that her adventurous baby would soon have more space in which to exercise his sturdy limbs, for he had developed an extraordinary faculty for rapidly crawling away on the nice, smooth boards of the deck.

'He's just made of quicksilver,' she said; 'I can't turn my head to thread a needle before he's off!'

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At last she adopted the plan of tying a piece of tape round the baby's waist, and tethering him to herself—'Tied to his mother's apron string,' as his father used to say. Even that sometimes failed however, as, unless the knot was very carefully tied, the busy little fingers managed somehow to undo it; and as Mrs Bent turned round, suspicious at the unusual quiet, she would find the tape lying on the ground, and the baby sidling away as fast as he could, on all-fours, with a triumphant look on his mischievous little face.

Jack was to meet Kitty at Quebec; and, long before the ship came near enough to allow the crowd at the docks to distinguish the faces of the travellers, he was there waiting impatiently to catch the first glimpse of her.

Where was she? Six years could not have made much difference in her. Was that Kitty in the bright pink blouse and the blue flowers in her hat? No, that was not Kitty; she never looked so gaudy as that. Was it that girl standing by herself looking down into the water? No; she was too short, and too square.

Ah, there she was, of course: how could he ever have thought those other girls in the least

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like her? How it brought back the old village life to him as he caught sight of her, looking so fresh and sweet and pretty—just as he remembered her when she said goodbye to him at the garden gate. Would she know him, he wondered; he must have altered much more than she had, after six years of roughing it in the wild country of his adoption. He waved his cap, and hoped for an answering acknowledgment from her. Yes; she saw him, and knew him at once. The little white shawl in her hand was shaken vehemently up and down, and Kitty's face was turned to him alone, as if he were the only figure on the quay. And when in a few minutes he was able to step on deck, and hold her in his arms, his cup of joy seemed running over. She was just the very same Kitty, only better than ever, and a thousand times more dear.

And what were her thoughts? She felt quite shy with this tall, handsome young man, with his bronzed face and resolute manner; and yet there was a wonderful feeling of confidence and absolute safety as he took both her hands in his, and looked down into her eyes with such

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possessive love and happiness, that it almost made her heart stand still. She forgot all about the long journey and the unknown future. She was with Jack, and he would take care of her. That was enough for her.

They passed Philip as they were preparing to leave the ship in company with the Purcells, with whom Kitty was to lodge until her marriage. Jack's heart was too full of happiness for anything but friendly feelings towards everyone, even including his less fortunate rival. He gripped Philip's hand with hearty warmth, and told him to be sure and come to see them on shore whenever he could; and he was too radiantly happy to notice the scowl that Philip tried to veil under a jaunty, independent manner.

It was a happy circle that gathered round the tea-table in the little house Mr Purcell had taken for his family. He sat at the end of the table, with a beaming smile on his good-natured face, and a child on each knee. Mrs Purcell sat at the other end, with, if possible, a broader and more beaming smile, while she poured out tea with great satisfaction. Jack and Kitty sat opposite to one another; and Jack had the greatest

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difficulty in attending enough to his hostess, and her continual flow of conversation, he was so taken up with Kitty. He could hardly take his eyes off her. It seemed too good to be true that she was there, only the width of the table away from him, and that she had come all that long way across the ocean to be his wife. He could hardly trust his own senses.

‘I’m truly thankful to be sitting pouring out tea from my own teapot in my own house again,’ said Mrs Purcell with great energy, ‘after having gone through storms and tempests, and all the other dreadful things you have to put up with on board ship. And I will say, Willie,’ and she gave an approving nod to her beaming husband, ‘that for a man I think you’ve just done wonderful. I never would have given you credit for getting so many useful things together.’

“Well, you see, I minded what you used to do in the old home; and I just got the things in as I thought of them, but I’m afraid I’ve forgotten a lot. I just said to myself something like this: First she got up—there’s a bed needed straight away, and sheets and blankets, and a nice bright coverlet to cover it up in the daytime. Then

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she'll dress—and I must be sure to get a looking-glass, or she'll be calling out that I've forgotten the most important piece of house furniture, in a woman's eyes.'

'Don't you be impudent, Will,' retorted Mrs Purcell; 'men sometimes use it to shave by, don't they? So you needn't put it all on the women-folk.'

'Well, well, I won't quarrel with you the first day, so I'll go on. Then she'll light the fire—coals and poker needed there, and wood. Then she'll put the kettle on—and I went out and bought a kettle. When the kettle boils, she'll want her cup of tea—well, there's a pound of the best tea, and the tea-things all ready set. That's the way I went about it, wife; but I doubt you'll find some funny mistakes, and a lot to get yet. But, thank God, I've got on well; and I can give you the money, and you can go out and have a day's shopping to-morrow, to make up all deficiencies.'

'You're a good man, Will,' said his better half, going round and giving him a hearty kiss; 'and I set more store on all the trouble and thought you've taken for me than I do on the

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things themselves—good and handsome though they be.’

It was late before Jack went to his lodgings, there was so much to talk about. Six years of news needs some time before it can all be told. Jack had to gather up all the threads of the old life at Fairbrook, for letters had left much unsaid: who was dead, and who was married; who was still there, and who had gone away. He wanted to hear about his old companions. What was Phil going to do in America? Why had he come over? He did not think he had improved in manners, though he certainly was a very good-looking chap. His arm stole round Kitty’s waist as they sat side by side on the sofa. ‘I’m mighty glad *I’ve* got you, and not Phil,’ he whispered to her; and the look she gave him showed, in a most satisfactory manner, that she was glad too.

Then she had to ask him about plans, and wanted a detailed description of the little log-house and its surroundings. ‘I have named it Fairbrook Farm, Kitty,’ said Jack, ‘as I thought you would like it called after the old place; and there’s a dear little brook that

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runs close to the house, so the name suits it well.'

But I cannot tell you all they said (they would not like it if I did), nor can I tell you all they did, those happy days at Quebec, when they learnt to know one another better than they had ever done before, and did their best to make up for those six long years of separation.

The wedding day came at last, and though it was a very quiet one, and few people in that large city knew anything about it, there were two hearts to whom it meant much ; for was it not the day that made them both one—the day that gave them to each other, ' for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health,' as long as they both should live?

Kitty began that day with God. The first thing on waking was to kneel quietly down and put everything into her heavenly Father's hand ; and she went through the day with a glow of peace in her heart, that made the earthly love still more beautiful and wonderful.

As Jack let his eyes rest upon his bride as she stood beside him in the church, in her simple white dress, with pretty, flushed cheeks, and the

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long lashes shading her soft blue eyes, she seemed to him like some delicate flower given into his keeping; and he said 'I will' with almost a defiant ring in his voice, as he determined, on his part, never to give Kitty any cause for complaint, and to be to her all that a husband should be to the woman who gives herself so tenderly and unreservedly to the man she loves.

Yes, Jack, you are an honourable and an upright man, and you mean to do your best, but have you left God out on this your marriage day?

CHAPTER V

THE BRIDE'S HOME-COMING

‘WELL, lass, here we are at last. We’ve not far to go now before we’re home.’

Jack Falconer was standing on the little platform of One Fir Siding, on the great Canadian-Pacific Railway, having just helped Kitty down from the car, with various boxes and queer-shaped bundles which had been stowed away during the long, tiring journey from Montreal.

‘We’ve got about thirty miles to drive now, haven’t we, Jack?’ said Kitty brightly.

‘Just about that,’ replied Jack. ‘Come here,’ he said, taking her arm, and leading her beyond the end of the small wooden building that did duty for a station. ‘Do you see that hill away there in the distance, with a dark patch of wood running right down to the plain? That’s where our home lies, Kitty.’

Kitty strained her eyes to follow Jack’s directing finger, and tried hard not to feel a little

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sinking of the heart when, across the wide, undulating miles of prairie, she caught sight of the dark, fir-clad hills, stretching away in apparently endless ranges of low, broken summits towards the horizon.

She looked back along the railway line, and thought of the long days of almost incessant travelling since they left Quebec ; of the weary sea-voyage that had preceded her meeting there with Jack ; of the start from Fairbrook to join the ship at the Liverpool docks ; and, as her brain wearied with even the thought of that long journey, the early morning seemed very far distant when she crossed the stone slab and picked that last bunch of sweet peas from the old garden before mounting the light cart in which Bessy and her grandfather were awaiting her.

Was this really the end of the long journey ? She somehow had not realised it was quite so far away and quite so lonely.

Suddenly she felt that Jack was watching her, and turning to him she saw such a tender, pitying look in his brown eyes that her heart gave a great throb, and a rush of comfort seemed to come over her.

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‘My poor lass, have I asked you too much?’ said he. ‘It’s not fair of me to have brought you so far away from everything. You’ve given up a deal for my sake, Kitty ; but I’ll do the very best I can to make it up to you, see if I don’t !’

Kitty gave him no answer but a little, half-reproving pat on his arm, and a quick look of love and trust that spoke volumes.

Where wouldn’t she go with Jack ?

They were interrupted by the arrival of the stationmaster, who was accompanied by his wife. They shook hands with Kitty warmly.

‘My wife’s been watching for you, Mrs Falconer, ever since she knew Jack was off to fetch you, and she’d take it very ill if you didn’t stay at our house on your first arrival among us. We’re strangers now, Mrs Falconer, but I hope we won’t be strangers long.’

Kitty had heard much of Mr Manly and his wife, as Jack had lodged with them for some months during the past winter, and her heart warmed as she heard the friendly greeting.

While Jack went off with Mr Manly to procure a waggon for the next day, to convey themselves and their belongings the thirty miles that

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still lay between them and their destination, Kitty was carried off by Mrs Manly, and made thoroughly at home. Soon she was seated in the arm-chair by the fireplace ; while Mrs Manly bustled about preparing tea, all the time keeping up a running conversation and a fire of questions. What sort of voyage had she, and how long were they at sea, and did she know Jack when she met him? He was a fine lad, and one to be proud of. The way he'd got on was just wonderful ; and a nice little farm he'd got up there among the hills. Not that she'd ever seen it, but she'd heard of it ; and she hoped, now Kitty was come, she might, perhaps, sometimes get an invitation to stay a night there, and look round it for herself.

Kitty wondered that Mrs Manly did not get quite breathless with the rate at which she talked ; she had not time even to put in a word edgewise. But she felt wonderfully comforted by the genial, motherly welcome ; and when Mrs Manly, in the pauses of laying out the cups and saucers, came and stood before her, with her arms akimbo, and a smile on her rosy face, while her eyes danced with simple delight at the rare pleasure of having

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a visitor, Kitty felt inclined to get up and kiss her.

'You can't think what it is to see a new face now and then, and how welcome anyone is of the sort that you can ask to sit down and have a cup of tea with you. It's lonely enough here, I can tell you, and yet we're the biggest settlement that you'll find for fifty miles up and down the line. What you'll do up there all alone among the woods I don't know. I can't help being rather sorry for you, Mrs Falconer, as anyone can see you've not been dragged up, as the saying is ; but you know a nice thing when you see it, and I fear you'll find it rough enough up there.'

'I must just do the best I can, and make the best of everything,' Kitty replied brightly ; 'and Jack has bought a lot of nice things to make it home-like, besides what he made himself before he went away to fetch me. You know he was a carpenter by trade in the old country.'

'You need not tell me that, my dear,' said Mrs Manly triumphantly. 'Jack's told you he lodged with us, perhaps, when he was working for the storekeeper last winter, but maybe he didn't tell you what he used to do of an evening

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out there in my back shed. Right hard he did work, to be sure, and what that lad turned out fairly dumfounded me. Wait till you see the tables and chairs and the fine cupboards waiting for you up there! They all came out of my back shed, I tell you, and good, honest work was put into them. I mind how proud he was the night before he got them carted up to the farm. "That's all for my Kitty," he said; and I mind I said to Manly afterwards: "I hope his Kitty will be worthy of him, for he's a rare lad is Jack." But now I've seen you I don't wonder he wearied for a sight of your face. We must be friends, Kitty; for I feel as if I knew you already, having heard so much of you from Jack.'

'Have you many neighbours here?' asked Kitty.

'It's a growing place,' replied Mrs Manly; 'it is wonderful how these settlements seem to spring all at once into quite little towns. When we came, only two or three years ago, there was hardly anyone, and now we've got quite a colony. There are some good farms, too, all round us, and more are being taken up every year.'

'We're at the very outside edge of civilisation,

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aren't we?' said Kitty. 'Jack told me there were no neighbours within several miles of us, even on the side nearest One Fir Siding, and nobody on the other.'

'That's true,' replied Mrs Manly. 'You'll not have many callers up there. You must get Jack to bring you with him, as often as you can, when he comes to the settlement on business. It will cheer you up; and you'll always be welcome here, I can tell you.'

During the evening many of the neighbours dropped in to shake hands with Kitty; for Jack had been a universal favourite, and they were anxious to see the wife for whom he had so long waited, and for whose reception he had been preparing.

There were a good many things to purchase, too, at the stores, both for the house and the farm, and for the first few hours after her arrival Kitty had not much time to think of this strange, new life which was beginning to open out to her in more distinct form now that she was so near the end of her journey. Everything seemed so different from the old life in the village at home. She sometimes felt as if she were living in a dream.

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Next morning they were up by five o'clock, to give them time to reach Fairbrook Farm that evening before dark ; for they had to go at a sober pace, because of all the precious things in the light waggon which Jack had borrowed for the occasion. Many of the inhabitants of One Fir Siding were out to bid them farewell, early though it was, and Kitty had several kind gifts thrust into her hand after she had taken her seat among the packages.

'Here's a jar of honey for you, Mrs Falconer ; perhaps you'll like some for your tea this evening.'

'I've no bees, but I've ducks,' said another portly woman, the blacksmith's wife ; 'and as I hear your husband has only got cocks and hens for you, here's a setting of ducks' eggs that maybe you'll be able to rear.'

'And here's a basket to put them in,' said another ; 'my son made it for me last spring, but I've never used it ; perhaps you'll find it useful.'

The baker brought a cake which he had iced the night before, with 'God bless you' in pink letters on the top. And when Kitty drove away she felt as if she were leaving real old friends, and could hardly believe that only the night before she had arrived a stranger amongst them.

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They stopped to rest in the middle of the day at what Jack called the half-way house, owned by a solid-looking farmer, with a poor, dispirited wife, who seemed oppressed with her large family and her many cares. She was inclined to be querulously envious of the waggonful of goods, and would have damped Kitty's spirit with her tales of difficulty and hardship if Kitty's spirit had been inclined to be damped.

Kitty admired a pretty little grey kitten and a young collie pup that were playing together on the hearth, and Mrs Tims insisted on her taking both away with her. 'They'll be company to you up there; and I'm sure I don't want them hanging about here, always getting under my feet. We've three dogs and four cats already, besides any amount of babies, so I'm sure you're welcome to the pair of them if you care to take them.'

As they drew near to the farm Jack's heart began to fail him, as he wondered how it would all strike Kitty. He had thought the house looked so nice that evening when it first stood complete before him in the sunset, and it seemed to him quite luxurious when he carried

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in the furniture he had made in Mrs Manly's back shed. But now he remembered how cosy the old cottage was in the old home, and how many things even Mr Purcell had thought necessary for his wife in their house at Quebec, and he feared Kitty would be terribly disappointed. He and Micky, the hired man, had lived in it ever since the early spring, and they had found it comfortable enough. But Kitty?

'I wish it had been a better place, and more fit for you,' he said as he neared the spot from which they could first catch a glimpse of the house.

'I'm just longing to see it, and begin my housekeeping,' said Kitty; 'it is far more fun helping you to make it all nice than if it were so beautifully arranged and fitted up that there was nothing left for me to do. I know you'd like to give me a golden palace, dear old Jack, but I'm sure a log-house is far more delightful. Oh, what a sweet little place!' she exclaimed, as suddenly they came in view of the farm; and all lighted up as it was by the warm rays of the golden afternoon sun, it certainly was looking its best.

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The forest behind made a beautiful background to the little house, which seemed to nestle cosily in a framework of green. The brook from which it got its name flowed close beside the house, and formed a pretty waterfall a little farther down. Three cows were standing waiting to be milked in front of the sheds, which were built in a low line to the left; and two horses, a white and a brown, were grazing near by. Micky was just going up the path to the house with his sickle in his hand, but he turned when he saw the waggon, and came to meet them. Two or three very respectable-looking haystacks showed that he and Jack had been busy earlier in the season; and the yellow cornfield which lay a little below, on a gentle slope towards the sun, spoke of the rich fertility of the virgin soil. It had been broken up by Jack the year before, and now seemed to give good promise of an abundant harvest.

Very soon Kitty stood at the door of her house; and as Jack led her over the threshold, and pointed out to her the various little arrangements he had made for her comfort, she

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felt herself to be a very happy bride, in spite of all the croaking prophecies of so many of her friends.

That evening, as she sat with Jack on the seat he had made for her beside the door in remembrance of the one in the old garden, and they watched the sun go down, as they had so often done before, she nestled against his arm, and said shyly: 'Isn't it good to watch the sun *together*, Jack?—doesn't it make a difference! I feel so thankful to God for having brought us safely here to this little home. I seem to want to turn that blessing into a prayer—the one the High Priest used for the children of Israel. Don't you remember it, Jack? Would it not be nice to read it out here, our first evening?'

She went into the house, and brought out her Bible, and there in the glow of the autumn sunset, with the glorious view of hill and plain stretched out before them, and their new home behind, she read those wonderful words which still fall with as deep a sense of peace and comfort on the Christian soul as they did when first heard by Jewish ears.

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'The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.'

Jack's only response was to draw his wife closer to his side, while he kissed her upturned face, and thought how good and beautiful she was. He only knew the earthly peace as yet; he had not learnt to know the peace which was filling Kitty's heart at that moment—the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.

CHAPTER VI

TRANSFORMATIONS

‘**I** DON’T like to leave you so long by yourself, Kitty,’ said Jack, next morning, as he set off with Micky for a long day’s harvesting.

‘You need not think of me, Jack,’ replied Kitty ; ‘I shall be so busy I shall not have time to feel lonely ; indeed, I’m quite longing for you and Micky to go, so that I may begin my work. You won’t know the house when you come back again. You’ll see I will have everything unpacked, and set out ready for you. You’ve got your dinner away with you, and I’ll be down to the field about four o’clock with your tea, so it won’t be long before I see you again.’

She stood at the door of the house, and watched the two men go down the slope towards the great golden expanse of corn, that stood ready for their sickles in the morning sunshine ; and Jack, looking back to wave a farewell, thought

what a pretty picture she made in the low doorway, with the grey kitten in her arms, and the puppy vainly trying to scramble up her apron towards his playfellow.

She waved her hand in return, and then, firmly setting down the kitten, and telling the collie she could not think of attending to him on such a busy day, she turned into the house, and stood looking round her kitchen. It certainly did not look very homely yet. Micky's efforts at house-keeping had been of the very simplest kind, and his ideas of cleanliness and order were very limited. The nice, strong table which Jack had made for the centre of the room was covered with stains, for it had stood destitute of any sort of table-cloth all the summer. On it now lay the scattered remains of breakfast, which had been served in tin mugs and plates, for hitherto the establishment had boasted no crockery. Another smaller table stood in the curtainless window, covered with miscellaneous articles: a rusty knife, a bowl with some meal for the chickens, an old hat of Jack's, and various other similar ornaments. The mantelpiece was bare, except for a few nails and a hammer, and

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one or two pipes laid on a gaudy tin that had once held tea, but now contained some remains of tobacco. The four chairs, that had shone with varnish when Jack first showed them to Mrs Manly, now looked in a forlorn and rather dirty condition ; while round the room, on various nails, and in the corners, hung or lay odd garments, hats, tools, whips, sticks, and other ill-assorted paraphernalia.

‘The first thing,’ said Kitty as she pursed up her determined little mouth, ‘is to get some nice hot water, and begin to clean. Then I shall be able to unpack some of the things, but at present I really could not put down anything anywhere.’

So she set the smoky old kettle on the fire, and got Micky’s tin basin, and while the water was boiling she cleared as much as she could out of the kitchen into the sunshine in the front of the house. Then she pinned up her skirt, and turned up her sleeves, and, putting on a big, coarse apron, went to work.

Everything that could be scrubbed was scrubbed—the window and the door and the walls and the floor, not to speak of the tables and chairs

and the cupboards. And then she went into the bedroom, on the other side of the little entrance, and scrubbed that, and also the small room behind, where Micky slept; and when she had whitened the hearth and polished the chairs she sat down on one of them, quite exhausted, but triumphant, and had a cup of tea and some cold bacon and bread for her dinner.

This refreshed her, and as it was then only about twelve o'clock, for the men had gone off early, she set to work to empty some of the boxes and crates they had brought with them the day before.

Several of her old friends at Fairbrook had given Kitty presents to take with her, and two or three thoughtful ones had given money, to buy something she wanted on her arrival, so with her own savings, and some of Jack's earnings, she had been able to bring with her some really nice and useful things for her new home. The old clergyman and his wife had made her promise to get a tea-service for their present; and this she unpacked first, and set out on the long shelf which Jack had put up for her in the kitchen. Such a nice set it was, with a pretty

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blue pattern, and everything to match. When she had put all the plates resting against the wall at the back of the shelf, and arranged the cups and saucers and milk jug and sugar basin in front, with the shining Britannia metal teapot in the middle, she had to step back to admire them before she went on to unpack anything else.

Soon her shelves and cupboards were filled with good, useful household requisites—all well-chosen and necessary. A bright, new tin kettle sang on the hob, and a big saucepan stood ready for the rabbit stew that was to be their supper that evening. A bright rug, bought at Quebec, lay in front of the white hearthstone, and Bessy's little 'Bee' clock ticked cheerily in the centre of the mantelpiece, with a green vase on each side, which Kitty intended to fill with flowers after she had taken the tea down to the harvest-field. A nice, red table-cloth, given her by Janet, just fitted the table in the window, and on it, Kitty put the few books she and Jack had brought with them, with two or three framed photos of the 'old folks at home.'

A pair of cheap white curtains were soon hung

on a tape, which was tacked across the window, now shining and glistening as the result of the vigorous polishing it had undergone earlier in the day. These were looped back to a nail by a broad strip of bright turkey twill, a piece of which Kitty had brought with her to make a cushion or two when she had leisure. When she had completed these arrangements to her satisfaction she took the hammer and nails, and, mounting on a chair, proceeded to fasten up a large text over the mantelpiece, so that it could be seen the first thing on entering the door. It was a text with silver letters and sprays of forget-me-nots. We have seen it before. It was the very same that Jack had won as a prize for repeating the words at Sunday school. His mother had kept it in a frame, until she gave it to Kitty to take with her to America, so that it was in almost as good condition as when Miss Maynard held it up before her little class.

‘I must get Jack to make a new frame for it here; and, perhaps, I might be able to get a bit of glass somewhere: it would be such a pity if that pretty text got smoked and dirty. What

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a finish it does give to the room, to be sure,' she said as she descended from her chair, and looked up at it from the rug. She read over the words slowly:

'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.'

'How dreadfully helpless we are without Him!' she said to herself as she kept her eyes fixed on the words. 'What a comfort it is to feel God's care is over me here, so far away from everyone. I must go and get my favourite text out of my box, and put it below the big one, I think; they would go so well together.'

She soon found it, and it was quickly nailed up, just over the clock.

'The Lord is thy Keeper.'

She stood for a moment lost in thought. 'That little verse seems more beautiful every time I read it. It is wonderful how it takes away all the fears and loneliness, for, of course, if He is my Keeper I must be kept safely. He could not lose me, or let me go.'

Suddenly her eyes fell on the clock: 'Why,

it is nearly half-past three. I must hurry up, or I'll never get the tea ready in time.'

The basket that had been given her at One Fir Siding came in most usefully now. It was soon packed with a loaf and butter, tea and sugar, a little bottle of milk, and the tin mugs and plates. Kitty decided that they were to be used on occasions like this, in case the pretty new set got broken. On the top of the basket she carefully placed the baker's iced cake with the beautiful pink letters. The new tin kettle she carried in her hand, and she did not forget to slip the matches into her pocket. She closed the door of the house to prevent the cows and chickens taking possession of it during her absence, and, accompanied by the collie pup, which she had named Trusty, and the lively kitten, she set out to find the men in the corn-field.

They were at work down at the bottom of the field, where the corn was ripest, and had got on well with the cutting, a nice regiment of well-bound sheaves bearing witness to their industry.

Jack made a comfortable seat for Kitty in the shadow of one of the alders growing on the

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banks of the little brook that babbled along cheerfully at the edge of the field ; but before she consented to sit down she insisted on helping to make the fire, and lay out the tea-things, while Micky fetched the water, and gathered sticks. Very soon the kettle was boiling merrily, and the tea made, and a very happy little party sat down to their cheerful meal, glad to take a well-earned and much-needed rest after the busy day.

‘I don’t think I ever tasted such nice tea,’ said Kitty, ‘or ate such nice bread. Mrs Manly would insist on giving me two of her beautiful home-made loaves to take away with me ; but I told her I was quite afraid to take them, because they would spoil you for my baking afterwards.’

‘No fear of that, Kitty,’ exclaimed Jack. ‘I tasted your baking before I ever saw Mrs Manly, and I know you can turn out as good a loaf as anyone.’

‘I’m glad enough to give up the baking to you, missus,’ said Micky. ‘When a man has to do all the outside work as well, and comes home dead-beat, he doesn’t want to begin cooking.’

‘However did you manage? I can’t think how you did it all,’ asked Kitty.

‘Oh, Micky is an old hand, and he knows well enough how to save himself trouble. Just you ask him about his stock pot, Kitty! That’s the secret for good food, and no bother. That big pot you found in the kitchen he used always to keep simmering on the corner of the stove, and everything went in there. Rabbits and chickens, and bits of bacon, odds and ends of meat, bones, vegetables, bread, rice—anything—everything—was popped in there, with a little pepper and salt for flavouring. If he shot a bird on his way home from work—it didn’t matter if he knew the name of it or not—off went the feathers, and in went the bird to join the company in the stock pot. When you came in tired and hungry you had only to make up the fire, and heat up the pot, and in a few minutes you could take out a plateful for yourself of good, nourishing food. I don’t know whether you would call it soup or stew; but it was *good*, that I can tell you, and comforting to a hungry man.’

‘And did it never come to an end?’ asked Kitty, laughing.

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‘It went on all the week, and was always cleaned out on Sunday morning, when we had time to cook a fresh bit of meat for dinner, and the remainder of that went into the pot at once, to begin again.’

Micky grinned as he heard this testimony to the admirable nature of his cookery, and, remarking that he could furnish dessert as well as soup and stew, he disappeared among the bushes that fringed the banks of the stream, and soon returned with his tin can full of large, ripe raspberries, which formed a delicious ending to their little picnic.

Kitty packed up the tea-things after she had washed them in the clear water of the brook, and then they all three spent a lazy half-hour, resting and talking under the shade of the alders.

As Jack leant back, with his arms under his head and his pipe in his mouth, he thought how different the whole place had looked before Kitty came. Sitting there in her pretty print dress, with little pink flowers all over it, and a white sunbonnet shading her bright, happy face, she seemed to him like a sunbeam herself, shedding a light over everything. The very cornfield

seemed more golden since she had come down, and the voice of the water had broken out into song.

And when, after two or three hours more of labour in the harvest-field, he and Micky turned their weary feet in the direction of the log-house, the difference seemed even greater as they crossed the threshold. Instead of a dark and cheerless room, without any sign of comfort or preparation, they saw a tidy little kitchen, with a bright wood fire, and a table covered with a clean white cloth, ready set for supper, while a grateful odour of stewed rabbit and coffee greeted them at the door.

Jack could hardly believe his eyes. 'What have you done to the place?' he said, standing still in his astonishment. 'Can it be the same room? You *must* have been busy, Kitty; you've done simply wonders. You're a regular magician.'

Kitty looked up at him with pleasure in her eyes. 'I am so glad you like it all, Jack; I wanted to give you a surprise.'

'Like it all? I should just think I did! Why, I feel like a king just come into his kingdom, I'm that proud and pleased.'

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‘Well,’ said Kitty, laughing, ‘the queen will be very angry if you and Micky don’t go at once and make yourselves tidy for supper, for if you are much longer her nice rabbit stew will be all spoilt.’

‘That’s the right sort of young woman,’ murmured old Micky as he shambled off to his back bedroom; and as Jack washed his face and brushed his hair he ejaculated to himself more than once: ‘What a blessed little wife I’ve got!’

CHAPTER VII

MRS MANLY'S STORY

THE bright days of autumn rapidly glided by. The corn was cut, and carried home, and made up into stacks, ready to be threshed. There was much to be done both inside and outside the house ; Kitty had not much time to think of loneliness, she was so busy. She had the cows to milk and cheeses to make, besides butter for their own use. She had her hens and chickens to look after, and her little family of ducks ; for she had found a foster-mother for the setting of eggs, and ten little yellow ducklings soon appeared, to dabble about in the weeds by the side of the brook. The calves and young pigs had to be fed and attended to ; and when Kitty had finished all these duties, besides the daily cleaning and cooking and sewing, she generally found that it was time to go to bed.

The men were no less busy ; for the crops had all to be gathered in, and what they did not need

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for their own use taken to One Fir Siding to be sold. The journey there and back took them two long days, and great were the preparations when one of these expeditions was on hand. How proud Kitty was when she sent her first nice, fresh cheeses to be sold ; and as Jack drove the waggon, with its load of golden grain, or fine, fat young pigs, he whistled as he went along ; for he felt that life was going well with him, and that the world was a very pleasant place to live in. Then the potatoes had to be taken up, and the maize gathered in ; and when the first snow came the young cattle which had been out pasturing on the rich grass-land had to be driven in, and fed. When the ground became hard with frost, and no work could be done in that direction, rails had to be split for fences, and new out-houses built, and firewood chopped. There was never any lack of work at the busy little farm.

Sometimes, when the load was light, Kitty was perched up on the top, and enjoyed a little glimpse into social life again, her destination being always Mrs Manly's hospitable house, where she was ever sure of a welcome. Once or twice, at her earnest request, they would go on Saturday, and come

back on Monday, enabling her to join the small assembly of quiet, godly people who met Sabbath by Sabbath at the stationmaster's house for prayer and praise and reading of God's Word. Very homely were the words, and very simple were the prayers ; but though the voices were rough they were true and earnest, and Kitty used to return refreshed and strengthened to her forest home.

There was only one cause of sadness in Kitty's heart at this time, and that was the utter indifference Jack showed to the truths she held so dear. 'It's all very well for women and children,' he used to say, 'but a man is quite different. He has to make his own way, and learn to stand on his own feet. I've got on so far very well by myself, and I don't see any need for change.'

Winter turned into spring, and spring turned into early summer, and the first bright days of June found two visitors at Fairbrook Farm. The first was Mrs Manly, cheery and genial as ever, always ready with a kind word and a helpful hand; the second was a little stranger, who arrived utterly destitute one fine morning, and expected from that day forth to be fed, lodged, and clothed free of all trouble or expense to himself. And,

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strange to say, he was not only tolerated, but welcomed.

Jack felt his heart-strings strangely stirred when Kitty proudly showed him his first-born son lying snugly beside her, and for the first time in his life he felt humbled and helpless, as he thought of that little life given into his keeping, so frail, and so full of possibilities for good or evil; and he said 'Amen' with more earnestness than he had ever done before when Kitty drew him down to her, and whispered: 'May God help us to bring up our child to His glory.'

'I'm sure it's a mercy the good God put such wonderful love into the hearts of fathers and mothers,' said Mrs Manly as she watched Jack's and Kitty's delight over the baby the first day that Kitty was able to come with it into the kitchen. 'If it were not a labour of love what a trouble they would think the child, always needing such a lot of attention, and never a word of gratitude, but only a good loud cry if it doesn't get what it wants at once!'

'I'm sure my baby hardly cries at all,' replied Kitty in a remonstrating tone; 'he's just a little dear, that's what he is!'

'So he is, bless his little heart ; but I had a sort of recollection that he woke you up four times last night, and you've never had him out of your arms all this morning.'

'Oh yes ; but I love to know he needs me ; I could not bear to feel he could do without me,' said Kitty, cuddling the baby to her, and covering his face with kisses.

'Yes, yes, that's just it,' replied Mrs Manly ; 'true mothers forget all the trouble in the love to those helpless little lives, that owe everything to them, humanly speaking, and that weave themselves so into the very fibres of their hearts. Once you've felt the touch of those clinging, little baby fingers a great fountain of love seems to spring up in your heart that never dries up, not even when the little ones are taken from you and you are left with empty arms and an aching heart. I wish you had seen my two babies, Kitty.'

Mrs Manly spoke with a voice that was very soft and tender, and her eyes were full of unshed tears as she took her place beside Kitty on the chair Jack had just quitted, and gently stroked the baby's downy head.

Kitty put out her hand, and laid it caressingly

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on her friend's knee. 'Tell me about them,' she said. 'Unless you would rather not,' she added quickly, for she saw that Mrs Manly's heart was very full.

'I should like to tell you about them,' said Mrs Manly. 'Seeing you sitting there with baby makes me think of the time when I sat, just as proud, with my boy on my knee, and his sister running about, sweet wee thing, playing with her rag doll, and all of us as happy a little family as you could find anywhere.'

Kitty knew that Mrs Manly had lost both her children, very suddenly, some years ago, but she had never heard her speak of them before. She knew the loss had almost broken Mrs Manly's heart; but she had also heard that it was the brave, unselfish woman's pleasure to do what she could to minister to other mothers less desolate than herself when they were in any trouble or difficulty, and especially tender was she when she could help in bringing a new little life into the world. The mystery of another immortal soul being born into the changes and chances of this mortal life was always sacred to her; and who can tell the power for good of those earnest

prayers, breathed from the depths of her heart, by that bereaved and chastened mother, over the babies whom she held so lovingly in her arms, and whose own parents' lips had, perhaps, never even framed a prayer for themselves?

Mrs Manly leant back in her chair; and Kitty saw a far-away look come into her eyes, as if she were gazing into a world that was wonderfully beautiful, though it seemed a long way off.

'It was very sudden,' she said: 'they were both well at one o'clock on Friday morning, and by Sunday night they were both lying side by side on my bed, with their bright eyes closed and their little hands folded, oh! so quiet and still. Little May was the first to sicken. There had been some cases of fever in the street—we lived in the town then—and I was keeping my own two very much in the house, I was so afraid of any harm coming to them; but it was no use: the Master was calling my lambs to Him, and they had to go. I remember little May came and laid her head down on my knee, and I noticed she was very flushed and restless; and she fretted rather, which wasn't like her—she was always such a good, happy little thing.

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‘When Manly came in for his tea she was much worse, and her eyes had a look in them that frightened me ; so he went off for the doctor, and when he came he told me to put her to bed at once, for the fever had got a hold upon her. And then, I remember, when my heart seemed fit to break at the very thought of my little May being in danger, he turned to the baby, and said: “I fear this little man is in for it too.”

‘Oh, Kitty, I just felt stricken down with fear when he said that, it seemed such an awful blow. What a time we had with the two poor babes, hour by hour getting worse and worse, and we powerless to save them. The baby was the first to go ; and when I had to lay his lifeless body down, and knew that he would never open his pretty eyes on me again, I just turned to May, with an agony of longing to keep her with me still. But soon I had to watch her also pass away from me ; and I was left with only the two quiet little forms—all that remained to me of my fine, merry ones who had nestled in my arms so full of health and spirit only a few hours before.

‘My heart was broken, Kitty. I think I went almost mad at first, it all seemed so black, and the house was so empty and still. I remember I used to like to get away out of it as soon as I could when the work was done; and oh! how little there seemed to do now with no children to care for and think about.

‘It was one of those times when I had gone into the park to try to get away from my empty rooms, that the first gleam of light and comfort came to me. I had been sitting some time on a seat when an old woman, with a big black bonnet and grey shawl, came and sat down beside me. She was suffering much with her breathing, and seemed very feeble, so I began to speak to her, and asked her if she had far to go. She said she was living with a niece not far off; and her voice was so gentle, and her face looked so sweet and holy, that I longed to talk to her, and tell her about my trouble. She looked like one who had been through a deal herself; and I think she must have seen something in my face that drew her to me, for she laid her kind, wrinkled old hand on my arm, and said so tenderly: “There’s something on your heart, my dear, I can see.”

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And I turned to her, and answered rather fierce-like, for oh! my heart was sore. I said: "Yes; I've got enough to sorrow for. I'm a mother without children: I've lost both my little ones."

'I shall never forget her look when she turned her dim old eyes on me—though how I can call them dim I don't know, when they were just shining with the light of God—and she said, in such a triumphant voice it just thrilled me through and through: "*Don't call them lost* when they've gained the Kingdom of Heaven." And then she went on to tell me a little of her life: how she had buried four daughters, and how, when the last one died, a sweet, young girl of fourteen, she had been almost out of her mind, just like I had been. I asked her how she was able to bear the thought of it, and she answered, so patient-like: "My dear, I have a living sorrow. I had only one boy, my pride, and he was to be all the world to me; how I laboured for him, and how I loved him, and now, dear," and her weak voice shook a little as she said it, "I don't know where my boy is to-day. He's gone far astray, my bonny lad; he's sunk deep in the miry clay; and his mother's heart aches for the poor,

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lost lamb." And again she repeated those words which had thrilled me first: "Don't call them *lost* when they've gained the Kingdom of Heaven."

'I had many talks with dear old Grannie after that—she liked me to call her so; and she helped me to think of my pretty ones as not lost, but only gone before. She got me to take more interest in things, and not to be selfish in my sorrow; and though there's always a pain, and always will be, yet I can look upward, Kitty, and say like she did: "Not lost, for they've gained the Kingdom of Heaven." They are safe with the Good Shepherd; and it's only when wilful men and women go their own way, and wander away from Him, that they are *lost*. You can't be lost if you are in the Good Shepherd's arms.

"Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast,
There by His love o'ershaded,
Sweetly my soul shall rest."

'That was the verse little May learnt the Sunday before she died; and in a week she was lying in His arms, safe, my precious little lamb.'

Kitty pressed her baby closer to her breast, and the tears dropped on his white shawl.

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'Oh, Mrs Manly,' she cried, 'I can't think how you can bear it! I pray God He will spare my boy to me, and that he may grow up to love the Good Shepherd, and be His faithful follower. I do not know how I could give him up!'

'God grant he may long be spared to you, dear,' said Mrs Manly. 'God does not lead us all by the same paths, and till the trials come we need not go to meet them. When trouble is sent, help is sent too. So you must just enjoy your baby, and be happy in the possession of him; only be sure and keep very close to the Good Shepherd yourself, and teach your boy to love Him too.'

She pointed up to the text over the mantelpiece: 'They are safe who can say: The Lord is my Keeper.'

CHAPTER VIII

JACK GIVES HIS OPINION

KITTY was very sorry when the time came for Mrs Manly to go. It was such a pleasure to have someone to talk to about the little homely interests that kept coming up each day, and the house seemed so bright with her kind, genial presence. She was always busying herself about something or other for Kitty's help and comfort; it seemed as if she could never do enough for her.

'You quite spoil me,' Kitty said to her, laughing; 'you have done far too much for me; and I shall feel quite lazy and discontented when I have to begin all the hard work again by myself.'

'No, you won't,' replied Mrs Manly; 'it will all come back quite natural once you begin, and when you are feeling strong and well again. Only I am going to tell Jack he is not to work you too hard; for he must remember that a baby means a lot more of work and trouble in a house,

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and he must not expect you to do too much outside when this little gentleman claims so much from you.'

They were sitting on the seat outside the door, waiting for the men to come home for their tea. There was a little change in the appearance of the house since we first saw it. Old Micky, who was devoted to Kitty, and would do anything for her, had dug up a little space in front of the door, and in it Kitty had sown some vegetable and flower seeds in the spring, which were now beginning to reward her by their luxurious growth.

The little garden was surrounded by a rough fence of fir branches, to prevent the rabbits from the wood and the chickens from the farm from making too free with its contents ; and part of this fence was now covered by a good crop of scarlet runners, that made a fine show of green and red beyond the less picturesque rows of cabbages and cauliflowers, broad beans and onions, which, though less showy, gave Kitty much satisfaction, as she thought of the help they would be to her housekeeping.

There was a narrow path down the middle of the garden, and on each side of the border of parsley

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she had sown a few of the flower seeds which she had brought from the old Fairbrook home. A strange feeling used sometimes to come over her as she watched the familiar flowers blossom out here in the wilderness, and when she closed her eyes the scent of the stocks and mignonette often made her imagine herself back again in the old cottage by the brook. The fence just in front of the house was covered with sweet peas, which seemed to thrive better here in the new soil than they had even done at home, and she delighted in keeping her vases filled with their bright, delicate blooms as long as they lasted.

‘I shall always think of Kitty whenever I see a sweet pea,’ said Jack that evening as he walked down the garden path with Mrs Manly, Kitty having retired to put her baby to bed. ‘They are such bright, dainty blossoms, with their rich colours and pretty little hoods. You like to have them near you, they are so sweet, and yet not overpowering like some other flowers.’

‘You are right there, Jack,’ replied Mrs Manly vigorously: ‘wherever Kitty goes there is sure to be brightness and sweetness; she’s a dear, good girl, and I love her as if she were my own daughter.’

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But, don't forget, Jack, that a flower is a delicate thing, and needs care ; and a sweet pea is a sad sight if it is torn from its support, and left to itself upon the ground.'

'Oh, you can trust Kitty to me,' said Jack confidently ; 'I'll take good care of her ; she won't have to complain. She is very happy here, and doesn't want anything else, especially now she has got the baby.'

'But you can't say that it's not a lonely life for a young girl, with no one to speak to from morning to night except you and Micky when you come in for your meals. You must be sure to be a great deal to her yourself to make up for all.'

Mrs Manly had been longing for an opportunity to say a few words to Jack before she left, for she had noticed with distress that, although he was still devoted to his wife, he was not so thoughtful for her as he used to be in the old days when they first came to the farm ; many of the little courtesies and attentions had been dropped ; and in the evenings, when Kitty had looked forward to having him again after her long, lonely day, he would sit down to his book or his paper, and

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scarcely give her a word. He would hardly notice the little preparations she had made for him, about which she had been so happily busy all day. Jack was so confident of himself, and so sure of Kitty, that he forgot how necessary it is to watch lest selfish ease should intrude, and thoughtlessness spoil the life.

He was getting rather exacting also, and self was becoming altogether too much the pivot upon which all his thoughts and actions turned. He was thoroughly satisfied with the success that had attended him ever since he had set out in life, and when he looked round on his little home, and noted the air of comfort and prosperity which reigned over both farm and field, he unconsciously, in his own mind, echoed the self-centred exclamation of that heathen king of old when he gazed from his palace roof over the city on which he had expended so much labour: 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built?'

Mrs Manly could not help this thought coming into her mind when Jack, after leisurely letting his eyes wander round the fair scene before them, turned to her, and said: 'Well, I don't think I have done badly, considering this is only the second

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year I've been here, and that when I arrived that first autumn I had to begin at the very beginning, and put the first spade into the ground, and the first axe to the trees. I think it is all nonsense when a man says he can't get on in the world. Of course, if he is a lazy fellow, and takes to drink, and makes either a fool or a beast of himself, he has just got himself to thank for it if he doesn't rise. But if a man has a good head on his shoulders, and strong arms, and a will to work—why, what is there to hinder him from getting on, if he only goes the right way about it !'

'I say that those are some of God's best gifts to man, and if he uses them as gifts he does well,' said Mrs Manly, 'but I am always afraid when I see a man getting on, and thinking that it is all his own cleverness and skill that bring him success. I can't help thinking of that verse in Proverbs, where we are told so distinctly : "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." If we don't acknowledge Him how can we expect Him to direct our path?'

Jack laughed rather scornfully. 'I don't want much directing, thank you ; I have found my own

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way very easily so far, and I don't doubt but that I shall get on very well in the future. Of course, I believe in God; and when I die I shall need Him then, or I shall never get to Heaven; but as to thinking that it is necessary to be always bringing Him into all my earthly concerns, I just don't believe in it.'

'That's the mistake many and many a young man has made, Jack,' replied Mrs Manly sadly. 'They think they need God for their death, but how can they expect Him to be with them then, when they deliberately leave Him out of their life?'

Jack's memory flew back to the Sunday school at Fairbrook, and he said to himself: 'How strange that Mrs Manly should say just the same thing as Miss Maynard'; but he said aloud: 'Well, so long as I lead a good, quiet life, and keep the commandments, and don't drink or swear or steal or anything of that sort, I don't see how I can go very far wrong; and as I don't feel at all like dying yet I'll wait till nearer the time before I begin to turn religious.'

Mrs Manly looked at the strong, handsome young fellow before her, and the thought came

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to her: 'He looks no nearer death than did my babies that last day when we were so happy together, and yet they are gone, pretty dears. Death did not wait for them.' But she did not like to say too much, for she was afraid he would think she was preaching at him.

'I know what I *want* to do,' said Jack, 'and what I *can* do, and what is more, what I *will* do. I've got a nice house, which I built myself; a prosperous farm, which I can manage myself; a good wife, whom I love, and who loves me; and a little son into the bargain. What more can one want, except a sober, honest, hard-working life, and health to enjoy it all? I would go to church if there *were* a church, but as there is not any I have to do without; and Kitty reads me a bit of the Bible every night before I go to bed; and I don't work on Sunday, as so many others do, so what more would you have? You surely would not have me sit down and think about God all day long! Things would not get on very well if I did!'

'You do not need to stop life to meet with God, Jack; the secret is to have Him in the

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life, that it may be lived in His strength, and to His glory.'

'Oh, that's beyond me,' replied Jack; 'I'll leave that to you and Kitty. It may be all very well for a woman, but a man must think and work for himself, as I've often said before.'

Jack turned away, apparently to tie up a straggling branch of scarlet runner; and Mrs Manly saw he did not wish to continue the conversation, so she busied herself in gathering a few flowers to go on the supper-table, while she remarked on the wonderful way the baby was growing—an unfailing source of interest to them all. By the time the runner was tied up Kitty was calling them both to come to supper.

Old Micky was always a very silent member of the little company; but the other three had no lack of conversation: no meal could be dull in Mrs Manly's cheerful presence.

Jack was going to One Fir Siding next morning with the waggon, and Mrs Manly was going with him. She had been a good six weeks up at the farm, and her husband was beginning to think it was about time she returned.

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'It has been awfully good of Manly to spare you so long,' Jack said at supper; 'and as for you, I don't know how we can ever thank you enough for all you've done for us.'

'I've had a happy time up here,' replied Mrs Manly, 'and the only return I ask is that you will some day let Kitty come to spend a few days with me. I'll make a bargain with you on the spot,' she said, as a happy thought seized her: 'you bring Kitty over to spend Christmas week with me—you and her and the baby! I'm afraid I can't ask Micky too, or the poor beasts would not have a very happy Christmas; but there's not much doing then on the farm, and it would do you both a lot of good to have a real holiday, and see a little of your fellow-creatures. Do, now; it would be such a real pleasure to Manly and me.'

Jack looked across at Kitty, and he saw her face brighten up at the thought. Mrs Manly's words had made an impression on him, though he had not allowed her to see it. Perhaps it was dull for Kitty, and she was such a dear, good little thing!

'It is rather too early yet to decide,' he said;

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‘but I don’t see why we should not look forward to it when you give us such a kind invitation, if only it is fine enough weather to allow us to get down.’

‘It will be just delightful,’ said Kitty, her eyes sparkling at the idea. ‘I shall be counting the weeks all the time till Christmas comes. I do hope we shall be able to manage it!’

‘It makes it easier to go away to-morrow,’ said Mrs Manly, ‘if there is a chance of seeing you then. You won’t look forward to it any more than I shall, Kitty.’

Nevertheless, she found it very hard to say good-bye next morning when the waggon was waiting at the door, and the number of times she gave a ‘last kiss’ to the baby really could not be counted. She waved her handkerchief to Kitty till the house was hidden from her view ; and the last words she heard Kitty call out to her were : ‘Good-bye, dear Mrs Manly ; Christmas is coming!’

CHAPTER IX

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS

ALTHOUGH it was long in coming, Christmas did come at last.

For the second time since she had been at the farm Kitty saw the white mantle of snow cover the ground, making the dark fir-trees appear more sombre by contrast, and rendering the lonely little farm more isolated than ever. For days before Christmas Kitty had been watching the sky, glad when the heavy, snow-charged clouds passed away out of their horizon, and fearing, whenever the air was darkened with flying flakes, lest the drifts should be too deep for them to accomplish their long wished-for journey.

The afternoon of the twenty-second of December was calm and still, and the sun set in a bright red glow, which betokened a fine to-morrow; and as Jack came in from looking after the horses, and stamped his heavy boots before the door to

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shake off the snow, he called out cheerily to Kitty, who was in the kitchen washing up the dishes: 'If it keeps up like this I think we shall be able to get off to-morrow all right.'

Kitty almost dropped the plate she was washing in her excitement and delight.

'Well, it won't take me long to get ready, she said as she hurried on with her work. 'I've got everything prepared, and I'll soon get a little box packed for us to take with us.'

Jack had made a comfortable wooden cradle for the baby, which Kitty had fitted up with a home-made mattress and neat little blankets and sheets; and they decided to take it with them, as it could easily be tied on at the back of the sleigh, and baby would probably sleep better in it than in a bed to which he was not accustomed.

'I hope he will behave well,' said Kitty as she looked at him sleeping soundly by the fire. 'He is such a good baby here, but he sees so few people I expect he will be rather frightened when he is introduced to such a number of new faces. I've been busy doing up all his little frocks and pinafores in case we should be able to go, and

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I'm just longing to show dear, good Mrs Manly how well and strong her baby is looking.'

She did not tell Jack how many times she had spread out her own few things, and the baby's little garments, upon the bed in her room, and examined them to see that they were all as nice and fresh as they could be. No one knew how she had ironed and done up the baby's best white frock three times before she was satisfied with it: 'For he must wear that when he is baptised,' she said. She knew that at the Christmas season a clergyman from one of the larger settlements always came over and took a service at One Fir Siding, and she was determined to seize this opportunity of having her little son christened. He had received no name as yet, 'Baby' being quite sufficient for all purposes, but Kitty wanted him called 'John,' after his father. She would have liked the name 'Manly' as well, after their kind friends, but Jack was not quite so sure about this.

Kitty had been surreptitiously feeding up two of her biggest and finest ducks, and now Micky was despatched to capture them, for her to take on the morrow as a present to Mrs Manly. One

of her beautiful, fresh cheeses was also set aside for the same purpose.

‘I can’t bear to think of you being left all alone, Micky,’ Kitty said to him as the old man busied himself to help her; ‘you will have such a lonely Christmas.’

‘It’s not the first,’ he answered in his gruff voice. ‘Many and many a time I’ve seen the old year out and the new year in with no more company than my pipe; and, at my age, men don’t care for gaiety. I’ll get on very well here I’ve never felt any place so like home since I buried my Jessica, forty years ago, and it’s all owing to you, missus. Don’t you trouble your head about old Micky. I’m right glad you’re going to have a holiday, and a chance of speaking to someone; for this is a dull life for a young thing like you.’

This was a long speech for the silent old man; but his heart had been completely won by Kitty’s gentle kindness, and he loved both her and the baby with a quiet, steadfast affection, which showed itself in deeds rather than words.

Kitty went to the cupboard, and opening it, brought out a little bowl tied up in a cloth, and

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placing it on the table in front of him, she said : 'Here is a little plum-pudding which I made specially for you, Micky. I was determined you should have something to make you feel it was Christmas if we went away, and when you eat it you must think of me.'

'That I shall,' replied Micky ; 'though I don't need a pudding to make me do that ; but thank you for it all the same.'

Next morning the sun rose bright and clear, and the hard, white snow glistened in the radiant beams. There was no doubt that it was going to be a glorious day ; so Kitty's heart was light as she got ready the early breakfast, and gathered together all the wraps she could find to keep them warm during their long, cold drive. Soon the sleigh stood waiting for them, and Micky packed them all in with great care. The cradle was not forgotten, nor the ducks, nor the cheese ; and at last they were off, the bells of the horses tinkling merrily as they sped over the frosty ground.

It was a very long drive, however, and both Kitty and the baby were very tired before they saw the lights of One Fir Siding gleaming through the gathering darkness of the short winter afternoon.

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What a welcome they got when the sleigh stopped at Mrs Manly's door, and how bright and warm the little kitchen looked after the cold, snowy journey. How Mrs Manly admired the baby, enough even to satisfy Kitty's maternal heart, and congratulated them both on his sturdy limbs and plump, rosy cheeks. To Kitty's relief he seemed not to know what shyness was, and took to both their kind hosts as if he had known them all his life. Mrs Manly could hardly let him out of her arms all next day, and in the afternoon she and Kitty went a round of visits to Mrs Manly's special friends to display his beauties to admiring eyes.

Mrs Manly had determined to give a Christmas party in honour of Jack and Kitty and the baby ; so on Christmas Eve she and Kitty were very busy baking cakes and making pies, and otherwise preparing for the entertainment ; while the baby sat looking on with wide-open, wondering eyes, astonished at the unusual bustle after his uneventful life at the farm.

On Christmas morning several of the neighbours came to the house to join in a simple, quiet service in remembrance of the day. It was very

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sweet to sing the old, familiar words in that far-off land :

‘Hark, the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King.’

and to feel that they were joining with their dear ones in the old country who that day met in the holly-decked churches at home, to sing the praises of the Incarnate Son of God. As they read again the story of His wondrous birth in the humble shelter at Bethlehem, they seemed to be brought very closely into touch with the old days and the old friends, and rejoiced that here, even at the other side of the world, they could share in the same blessing and the same peace, which He brought to all people.

‘I’ve got a surprise for you this afternoon,’ said Mrs Manly as they were having their early dinner. ‘There’s an old friend coming to meet you to-night whom you did not expect to see here.’

‘Who can it be?’ asked Jack. ‘We weren’t expecting to meet anyone we knew. What is he doing here? Perhaps it’s a lady, though!’

‘No; it’s not a lady,’ said Mrs Manly; ‘it’s an old schoolfellow of yours, Jack. He’s come to be assistant to old Derby, the storekeeper—same

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as you were, one winter. He would have been in to see you before, but he only came back this morning, having been away for a week on business to Winnipeg.'

'It must be Philip Singleton!' exclaimed Jack. 'How strange that he should turn up here.'

'Well, you'll see him this evening, and be able to hear all about it,' said Mrs Manly, pleased at being able, as she thought, to bring about such a happy meeting.

Everything was ready when the first guests arrived, and the supper looked most inviting. Kitty's two ducks certainly testified to her successful poultry-keeping, and the cakes were tempting enough to entice those with the most delicate appetites to take far more than was good for them.

One of the first to arrive was Philip; and though Kitty could not be very cordial in her greeting, Jack was really pleased to see his old school-fellow. They had a long talk about old days; but as Kitty and her baby were surrounded nearly the whole evening by an appreciative circle of baby-loving women, she had no occasion to talk much to him.

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‘I’ve been asking Phil to come up to see us at our little farm, Kitty,’ said Jack, who had quite forgotten the old rivalries in the unwonted luxury of happier reminiscences. Philip had led him on to talk of the glorious cricket matches they had won, and the adventures they had gone through, when they were boys together, and had skilfully avoided saying anything to rouse Jack’s ancient jealousy or hurt his pride.

Kitty did not know what to reply, for she felt she could not truthfully say she would be glad to see him, so she only said: ‘I’m afraid you won’t find it very lively, Phil; we’re not so gay as Mrs Manly.’

‘I think you might have been more cordial with Phil,’ Jack said when he and his wife were alone, after the guests had departed; ‘even if you don’t much care for him you might consider me a little, and think that I like to see a friend of my own sometimes as well as you.’

‘I can’t help it, Jack,’ began Kitty, ‘but I *cannot* like Philip.’

‘Well, I’m sure I’m always glad when you can have Mrs Manly,’ retorted Jack angrily, ‘and when I ask a friend of mine up to my own

house I expect you to be at least civil to him.'

Kitty said nothing. She had meant to tell Jack how forward Phil had been on the voyage, but he spoke in such an unwontedly sharp manner that she felt herself silenced. She tried to persuade herself that, after all, it was only fair Jack should have any friends he liked to come to see him, and even if she did not care much for them she supposed she ought to be glad to welcome them for his sake. He must feel it even more dull at the farm than she did.

He saw a good deal of Philip during the Christmas week; indeed, Kitty thought that it was rather rude of Jack to leave the Manlys so much and to spend so many evenings with Philip and his friends. But she got comfort from the thought that he seemed to be really enjoying his holiday, and tried to excuse him to the Manlys by saying how glad he was to see his old friend again.

One day, when Mrs Manly and Kitty were taking the baby out for a walk, they passed Jack and Philip standing at the storekeeper's door, in company with several men who were lounging about

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with their pipes in their mouths and their hands in their pockets.

Jack looked rather uncomfortable as the two women went by; but instead of coming up to speak to them, as they expected, he only gave them a hasty little nod, and turned to the man next him, as if to continue the conversation their presence had interrupted.

‘What a rough set of men,’ said Kitty when they were out of hearing; ‘that one Jack was speaking to had a horrid face, I thought.’

‘He is a new-comer,’ said Mrs Manly, ‘and I don’t know much about him, but Philip seems to have taken him up rather. I know Manly did not care much for him.’

Kitty wanted very much to ask Mrs Manly what she thought of Philip; but she felt it would not be quite loyal to Jack’s friend, especially as she had a shrewd suspicion that a nearer acquaintance had not increased Mrs Manly’s respect for him.

Only too soon the Christmas week came to an end. On the Sunday which came between Christmas and New Year’s Day the expected clergyman appeared at the settlement; and after

morning service baby was brought in, in all the glory of his best white frock, and given the name of 'John Manly,' to Kitty's joy, and Mr and Mrs Manly's great satisfaction.

Again the sleigh stood before the door, and the cradle was tied on, and the little box stowed away ; but this time, instead of the fat ducks and the cheese, Mrs Manly insisted on sending various luxuries from the storekeeper's shelves which would prove of the greatest use to Kitty in her home amongst the woods. A pretty little hood and cloak for the baby had been substituted for the shawl in which he had travelled down ; and Kitty went away with her heart warmed and strengthened by the thoughtfulness and love of the kind friends who had enabled her and Jack to spend what had been so truly 'a happy Christmas.'

CHAPTER X

UNWELCOME VISITS

IT was not long before old Mr Derby's horse was seen making its way to Fairbrook Farm, with Philip Singleton on its back.

Jack was out in the woods with Micky, hauling timber, and Kitty was surprised to hear the sound of horse's feet outside the house so early in the afternoon. She went to the door, and was greeted by Philip, who was just proceeding to tie up his horse to the wooden paling.

'Well, Kitty, you see I could not keep away long; I was so anxious to see your new home. What a jolly little place you've got, to be sure.'

'Won't you come in and have something to eat, Philip?' said Kitty, intent upon hospitality; 'you must be very hungry after your long ride.'

'I think I must first put old Derby's horse into the shed, if you would show me the way. I must not forget him after he has carried me so well over so many long miles of snow.'

‘I was afraid at one time that I should lose my way altogether,’ said Philip as he came in, after having fed his horse, and taking the chair by the fire which Kitty offered him. ‘I thought I would risk a short cut, and lost the trail ; but I’m glad to say I soon found it again, for these solitudes would not be very pleasant on a winter’s night.’

‘I’m so sorry Jack is out,’ said Kitty ; ‘but I don’t think he will be long now, for he’s cutting timber in the wood, and it is difficult to get the sleigh through the trees after it grows dark.’

As Kitty busied herself setting the table, and frying some bacon, Philip entertained her, as he well knew how to do, with amusing stories of some of his varied experiences.

As it grew darker outside, the pleasant light of the fire lit up the comfortable kitchen, and threw a ruddy glow far out on the snow, through the window, over which Kitty never drew the curtain until Jack had come home.

Meanwhile the two tired men from the wood drew near to the house with their sleigh load of timber ; and Jack told Micky to go round with the horses, while he went to the door to give Kitty a

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hare which he had trapped that day in the forest. He had been watching the ruddy glow for some time as they drew near, enjoying the thought that soon he would be comfortably sitting before the fire, with Kitty bustling about him, getting everything ready for supper.

As he came round the corner of the house he was astonished to hear a man's voice within, an unwonted sound in their isolated homestead, and immediately afterwards a cheerful laugh from Kitty. He walked to the uncurtained window, and was surprised to see Philip Singleton sitting in his own arm-chair, leaning back as if he were quite at home.

He made a quick gesture of annoyance. 'Bother Philip coming up so soon. I didn't want him up here; I had enough of him down at the settlement at Christmas — too much, rather!' he added under his breath. 'It's all very well seeing him down there, for I need not go to him unless I want to, but if he takes to coming up here it will be rather too much of a good thing. Still, of course, I did ask him up that day I met him at the Manlys'. I wish I hadn't now, but I can't exactly tell him so. I

know Kitty did not much like it; she said she did not care for him, I remember, when I told her he was coming. He's a clever fellow is Phil, and he knows how to work round a man.'

He went to the door, but though he had his finger on the latch he seemed strangely unwilling to enter. He stood a minute, as if reasoning with himself.

'Surely I'm able to hold my own against anyone if I choose. I've got a will of my own, I'm thankful to say, and a dozen Philips could not move me unless I wished; but I must say I'm rather sorry to see him so soon again after my experiences down there. Anyhow, I suppose I must go in to him now.'

As he entered Philip got up, and stretched out his hand to greet him; but though it was the very guest that he had himself invited to his house it was with difficulty that Jack forced himself to be cordial, and to give him the welcome which he had promised. Philip, however, even if he noticed any stiffness of manner on Jack's part, did not allow it to affect him, and did his best to make himself agreeable to his host. He accompanied Jack when he went out again to attend to the horses,

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and chatted away at tea about such interesting subjects that, in spite of all his misgivings, Jack could not help thinking what a very clever, pleasant fellow he was after all.

Do what he might, however, to persuade himself that he was enjoying just what he had planned, he could not get over the annoyance he had first experienced on seeing that Philip had so soon taken him at his word ; but he did not choose to let Kitty see that he already repented of having given the invitation, and strove to make himself as cheerful and as genial as he could.

‘That old fox was prowling about again last night,’ remarked Micky next morning at breakfast.

‘I thought I heard Trusty barking, and wondered if my chickens were all safe,’ said Kitty. ‘It is a good thing you put that new hinge on the hen-house door yesterday.’

‘I didn’t hear anything,’ said Philip ; ‘you made up such a comfortable bed for me in the kitchen, and I was so sleepy after my long, cold ride, that I slept like a top.’

‘What do you say to getting out our guns,

and trying to have a shot at him?' asked Jack.

'There's nothing I should like better,' answered Philip. 'In this snow we should be able to follow his trail easily; and his coat ought to be in perfect condition in this weather.'

'I caught a glimpse of him one night,' said Micky, 'though I was not able to get near enough for a shot, and, as far as I could judge in the dark, he is an old black fox, so he would be worth following up.'

Among the many occupations which Philip had taken up and dropped was that of a gamekeeper, and his sporting instincts were fired by this information.

'I should like to have a try for him,' he said. 'I knew you sometimes had black foxes here, but I have never seen one yet.'

'You can always get a good price for the fur,' said Jack, 'especially if it is a thick winter coat; but it is difficult to get a shot at them, they are so cunning and suspicious. I have tried once or twice to track this old fellow, but he has always escaped me.'

Philip was eager to be off to try his chance

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with the fox, and soon Jack and he were carefully searching for the marks of the soft pads in the snow.

For about two hours they wandered through the forest, till they came out upon the banks of a small frozen lake, lying in the midst of the dark firs. Right across the smooth, white surface they plainly saw the little footprints, which disappeared into a thicket of undergrowth on the farther side.

‘I expect the old fellow is there,’ said Philip: ‘that’s the first likely place I’ve seen for him to hide in. I expect he’s got a comfortable bed of dry leaves somewhere under a fallen tree. Suppose you go round one side of the lake, and I go round the other: that will only give him one side on which to escape, as he would never think of starting off across the open.’

Jack agreed, and both the men crept off quietly, treading carefully, so as to avoid putting their feet on any broken branches, lest the snapping of a twig might rouse the crafty animal, and allow him time to escape before they were near enough to shoot.

‘I *must* get that fox,’ said Jack to himself;

‘it would be too aggravating to see Philip knock him over before my very eyes.’ And as he looked across the lake, and saw the tall, active figure on the other side making its way stealthily and noiselessly over the fallen tree trunks, and under the snow laden-branches, the old feeling of rivalry took up its place again in his heart.

‘I sha’n’t let Philip beat me.’

How often he had said this in the days gone by, as he contended with his rival over their school-books, or in the playground, and later in the more serious contests of early manhood; and now he said it again, with an ugly feeling rising up within him, which he did not check at once, as he might have done, but allowed it to lodge within his breast, and take root there.

Oh, those little seeds of envy and pride! Surely they must have been among the tares which the enemy sowed in the field while the men slept.

The two men were now within a short distance of each other, with only the thicket between them, when a black form was suddenly seen to skulk away from under the bushes in the direction in which Philip had prophesied. Jack raised

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his gun, and hastily took aim, determined that Philip should not be before him this time. What a beauty he was, with his long, thick brush and glossy coat! He fired once, twice. Both barrels were emptied, and the black fox only continued his flight with greater rapidity than before. He had missed, ignominiously missed, and an unwonted oath broke from his lips as the report of Philip's rifle rang through the frosty air; and at the first shot Reynard rolled over, dead, with a bullet in his heart.

It was all Jack could do to restrain his vexation and make himself listen to Philip's raptures over his booty. He answered in a surly manner when Philip remarked with surprise that the fox had only one wound.

'Why, Jack, I thought you had at least given him something to make him hurry away in that fashion; you must have been in a great state of excitement to miss him with both barrels when his black sides gave such a good mark against the snow.'

Jack did not know what to reply, for very shame, so he only said, rather grumpily: Well, we'd better skin him at once, and go home,

or Kitty will be wondering where we have got to.'

They tramped back again almost in silence, until they were nearly at the house, when Jack began to feel rather ashamed of his temper, and thought it best to make it up before they got in sight of Kitty's observant eyes. So he made a great effort to recover, and found Philip quite ready and willing to join in an amicable conversation on the respective merits of red and black foxes.

'Well, Jack, did you get him?' said Kitty as they entered the kitchen.

'No ; I missed him altogether, but Philip bowled him over first shot. The old fellow had taken up most comfortable winter quarters near a little lake, and was having his midday rest when we disturbed him.'

Kitty admired the beautiful soft skin, and smoothed the coal-black head, which had so lately harboured evil designs against her chickens.

All the rest of the day Philip did his best to put Jack in a good humour, and succeeded wonderfully. Jack could not but be fascinated by the

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clever sayings and the amusing stories which seemed to pour from Philip's lips, and he felt both sorry and relieved when his visitor took his departure next morning — sorry to miss the pleasure of his good company, and relieved from the strain which his presence undoubtedly brought.

One evening, about two months after the death of the fox, when Jack came in after his day's work, he was surprised to see the beautiful black skin lying on the kitchen table.

'Look at the nice present I have got,' said Kitty as she lifted it up to let him examine it better; 'if I ever go into town life again, won't I be envied for my beautiful furs!'

'Where did that come from, Kitty?' asked Jack, though he knew well in his heart that it could only have come from one source.

'Don't you recognise it, Jack? Black foxes are not so plentiful here!'

'Of course, I suppose it must be Philip,' replied Jack rather crossly. 'But however did it get up here?'

'He came himself with it,' said Kitty. 'He rode over this morning early from One Fir Siding to Tims' farm, where he had some business. He

left his own horse there, and borrowed one of Tims' just to ride up here and bring this to me. He is staying at Tims' to-night. Wasn't it good of him to take so much trouble about it, and to give me such a lovely fur?'

'Oh yes; it's a fine enough skin,' growled Jack; 'but I don't suppose he had any use for it himself. How long did he stop?'

The sight of the fur had stirred up the envious feelings again in Jack's breast, and it irritated him to see it lying there.

Kitty looked up in surprise. She had never seen him so surly as this before, and she could not understand it.

'He was only here about an hour, while his horse rested. I begged him to wait till you came in, as I thought how very disappointed you would be to miss him, but he said he could not stay this time.'

'It's just as well he didn't stop; I was much too busy to attend to him. Well, you'd better stow the skin away in some safe place till you have someone else to admire it besides me. I'm not particularly fond of black furs myself, though I will say that one *is* a beauty.'

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Kitty's disappointed and downcast face as she turned to put away the skin smote Jack's conscience. He tried to atone for his sharpness by being particularly pleasant all the evening; but all the joy had been taken out of the gift.

CHAPTER XI

BLACK BEAUTY CHANGES HANDS

TIME rolled on, and Jack continued to prosper. Many of the neighbouring settlers cast envious eyes on the fortunate master of Fairbrook Farm. He was a good manager and a hard worker, and as more and more land was broken up, and stock increased, his prospects seemed as bright as any man's in the country. Of course, it was uphill work still; but a good start had been made, and there was fair promise for the future.

Another baby had made its appearance at the farm, and Johnnie had to give up his place to a little sister. But in spite of all the apparent prosperity, Jack's face no longer wore the light-hearted, buoyant look which had been one of its chief charms in the early days after his marriage.

The autumn after the little girl was born was a very painful one to Kitty. She could not

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understand her husband in the strange moods which so often came over him. She was very lonely in those days, and a dark shadow seemed cast on what had been such a happy home. It did not come all at once, but seemed gradually to creep up, until it darkened everything. Sometimes as the sunny, joyous days of their early life at the farm rose up before her, her soft, patient eyes would fill with tears as she contrasted the present monotony of the dull, cheerless days, filled with hard toil, and lightened only with the love of her children. Where were all the happy plannings and eager, united interests which had so bound them together in that first bright year?

And yet Jack had never been unkind to her. If you had taxed him with want of love to his wife he would have indignantly repudiated such a charge. But gradually the little softening touches, which go so far to make a perfect picture, were dropped, on his part, out of the home life, and the whole of his energies both of mind and body seemed bent only on furthering his work, and bettering his prospects in every direction possible. And yet, though he un-

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doubtedly prospered, Kitty could not understand the strange disinclination which he always showed to give her any information on the subject of his gains. When he came back from One Fir Siding after taking down a load of grain, or other farm produce, he never told her of the success of his sale. If she asked him how he had got on, and whether he had got a good price, he would give a slight toss of his head, as he whiffed away at his pipe, and grunt out some vague reply, which told her little. 'He had done pretty well this time,' or 'Fair enough,' or some other similar unsatisfactory answer.

One day, when he came home after selling a more than usually valuable load, to Kitty's surprise he actually told her the sum he had received for it, not being able to keep such good news to himself.

'I am so glad,' said Kitty, pleased to be able to congratulate him, for she had always feared from his manner that his marketing transactions were not so favourable as he wished. 'Surely you will be able now to buy that new reaping-machine you wanted so much. It would be splendid if you could get it before next autumn.'

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‘That’s just like a woman,’ said Jack, with rather a hard laugh, as he turned away to hang up his hat—‘jumping to conclusions before you have a foot to stand upon! Do you think reaping-machines are picked up as cheap as that?’

‘Of course, I do not mean that one load could pay for a reaper,’ said Kitty pleasantly, trying not to mind the contemptuous tone; ‘but you’ve been down to One Fir Siding pretty often on business lately, and I hoped you would soon have enough, taking it altogether.’

‘Reaping-machines are not the only things wanted on a farm,’ replied Jack carelessly. ‘You had better leave business matters to me, old lady, and get on with your own work; you’ve enough to do with these two little beggars, I’m sure.’

Jack picked up his small son, who was trying to crawl up his knee, knowing well that daddy never came back from that outside world of which he knew so little without some delightful surprise in his big coat pocket. Some sweets, and a fine wooden horse, rewarded his search to-night; and both Jack and Kitty joined in amused contemplation of their rapturous first-born.

But though, apparently, all was happy and

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peaceful, and Jack exerted himself to give Kitty some account of his doings at the settlement, she could not get rid of the sore spot in her heart.

She thought of that day when he came back from One Fir Siding having sold his first waggon load of grain, and what fun they had as he made her sit down, and poured the money into her lap, insisting on counting out carefully the price he had received for her chickens and cheeses, and making her promise to buy something for herself with it, though she reminded him that she could not very well find bonnets and shawls on fir-trees, or chocolate drops on raspberry bushes.

What had happened to make things so different now. Was it always the case with married people when the novelty wore off? No; Kitty's heart rose up in vehement denial at this suggestion, as she felt the love surge up strong in her, and thought how easy it would be for her to go back to those old, tender ways. Probably men were different: they did not feel the need of it; or, perhaps, it was *her* fault, and she did not please Jack so much now as she did then. What would she not do for him if only she knew how! But she was very likely getting stupid and uninterest-

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ing from living so much alone, and it must be very dull for Jack having only her to talk to.

She quietly slipped out of the kitchen, and in the darkness of her own room she knelt down to lay the burden at the feet of the One who had so often been to her a never-failing help in time of trouble. She prayed for wisdom and gentleness, for cheerfulness and patience, that she might be a true helpmeet to him to whom she had given her heart's richest stores. If Jack had been able to look upon her at this moment he would have seen her face as it had been the face of an angel. Even when she quitted the room the light was still shining upon it, and Jack glanced at her in wonder.

'Come here, Kitty,' he said. 'Give me a kiss, and forgive me for being so cross. I know I spoke horribly to you, but I did not mean it. You are just the best and most patient little wife ever a man had, and I wish I were more worthy of you.'

So you would be, Jack, if you would only take your place beside her, on your knees, and seek Divine strength, as she does, to meet your human needs. She, in her weakness, is more than con-

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queror; while you, in your boasted strength, fail even to stand.

It was not long before Jack was off again to One Fir Siding, this time with a promising young colt, in which he had long taken great pride.

'Are you really going to sell the colt?' asked Kitty in surprise, when she heard Jack announce the fact. 'I thought you were going to keep him for your own work, as old Whitey is getting so shaky.'

'I've changed my mind about him,' said Jack shortly; 'he ought to fetch a good price, and Whitey will be able to go on for some time longer.'

'I think it is a great mistake,' said old Micky when Jack had gone off with the colt. 'He would make a grand horse, and we shall need him sorely now there is so much more land to work. But I don't know what's come to the master; he won't listen to a word, so I just have to hold my tongue.'

'Well, Micky, probably he knows his own business better than either you or I,' said Kitty quietly; 'only I hope he'll find a nice, kind

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purchaser for dear Black Beauty. He is so gentle and good he deserves a happy home.'

He had always been a special pet of Kitty's ever since he was a little foal, and used to follow her about like a dog, coming to her at her call. It had been very hard for her to pat his glossy neck for the last time, and let him nibble his last carrot from her hand; and, if the truth must be told, she kissed his broad forehead several times before she slipped the halter over his head which was to lead him away from Fairbrook.

After he had gone she sadly missed his eager welcome whenever she went outside the house. He never wandered far away like the other horses, and always greeted her with a low whinny when he caught sight of her, running up to be fondled and petted, and given little dainties dear to his horse's heart. It made her quite sad to see Jack come back alone; she had been half hoping that for some reason or other he would not be able to sell him, so that she might get her favourite back again. She was so anxious to know his fate that, contrary to her usual custom,

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she began to ask Jack what he had done with the horse.

‘So Black Beauty’s gone,’ she said; ‘do tell me what sort of a master he’s got, Jack. I hope he was a kind man, who won’t work him too hard.’

‘The horse is all right, Kitty; you needn’t worry about him,’ answered Jack. ‘The man that’s got him will take good care of him; he’ll probably be much better off than he was up here.’

‘Do I know the man who bought him?’ asked Kitty. ‘I should like to know what sort of work my dear Black Beauty will have to do.’

‘I don’t expect you know every man who comes to One Fir Siding; what is the good of telling you his name? Probably he’ll sell him too—almost at once. He said he would most likely send him to a friend farther down the line.’

‘I’m sorry for that,’ said Kitty; ‘I had hoped to see him again when I went to Mrs Manly’s, and now I’m afraid he’ll go quite away from me. At anyrate, I hope you got a good price for him. Wasn’t the man very pleased with him? He ought to have been—he is such a beauty.’

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‘Yes; he was quite pleased,’ answered Jack, busying himself in filling his pipe. ‘He’ll make a good horse in a year or two, though, of course, he’s young yet.’

The pipe was carefully lighted, and after a few preliminary puffs Jack murmured something about feeding the cows, and went out.

Why should Jack be so unwilling to tell her about the colt? Kitty could give no satisfactory answer to herself. Now that she thought over their conversation she remembered that he had neither told her the name of the purchaser nor given a hint as to the price he had paid. What reason could there be for not telling her? She certainly was not likely to gossip about his affairs, seeing that she never met anyone to speak to up here in the woods. He might have been more obliging when he knew she was so anxious to hear about her pet.

It was strange how often Jack had been to One Fir Siding this summer. Kitty did her best to persuade herself that she was glad that he should get a little change, and tried not to notice that he came back generally less cheerful than he went. She had given up asking him about

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his visits, as he seemed to dislike questions so much. Sometimes he used to stay with the Manlys, as of old ; but oftener he went to Philip's lodgings, or some other house.

'I wish people could *undo*,' said Mrs Manly, the morning after Jack had taken Black Beauty to be sold, as she stood at her window, sheltered behind a big red geranium, and watched Philip and Jack walking past.

'What do you specially want to undo, wife?' asked Mr Manly, coming to her side.

'Well, I don't know that my undoing would make much difference,' said Mrs Manly, 'as they knew each other before, but I wish I had never asked that fellow Philip Singleton to meet Jack Falconer under my roof that Christmas Day. He's a bad friend, if he's not altogether an enemy, and Jack's a different man since he got under his influence. My heart aches for my dear little Kitty, up there in that lonely place, though, probably, she does not know as much as we do how much there is to grieve about. I promise you Jack does not tell her all he does when he comes down here.'

'I'm pretty sure I saw Kitty's Black Beauty

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in Mr Derby's yard this morning,' said Mr Manly. 'I hope Jack is not going to be so foolish as to sell him; he'll never get a better horse for his own work, and Kitty is so fond of him, too.'

By this time Jack and Philip were out of sight. They turned off by the side of the store, and entered Mr Derby's stable. Black Beauty gave a low neigh as he looked round to see who was coming. Jack's face was dark and sullen.

'Well, Philip, you've done me out of a good horse, and I hope you're pleased at last.'

'Why, old man, it's perfectly fair, isn't it? If you had won you would have kept your horse, and got my dollars too. It was an even chance, only I had the luck to win.'

'You nearly always do,' said Jack sulkily; 'you would ruin me if you could, and not care a rap. At anyrate, you'll promise me to get the colt quietly out of the settlement, and not let people know about it. If anyone asks, you can always say you are selling it for me. I particularly don't want the Manlys to know.'

'Kitty might have a word or two about it,

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perhaps, if the truth got about,' said Philip sarcastically.

'Kitty is far too sensible,' retorted Jack.

'How much does she know about it?' Philip asked, with a queer smile.

Jack did not reply.

CHAPTER XII

PRIDE GOETH BEFORE A FALL

AS autumn wore away Jack became more and more gloomy. He worked hard and incessantly, doing the work of two men, and Kitty was beginning to fear his health would suffer. Early and late he was at it, never resting except when he took his long rides or drives to One Fir Siding. He was constantly taking down something to sell, but the strange thing was that he hardly ever brought back anything on his return journey. The reaping-machine had never been bought, and the implements about the farm were mended over and over again, and made to do, instead of new and more convenient ones being got in their place. The soil had proved exceptionally rich, and the crops were the admiration of the neighbourhood; but, though there was plenty of work for another hand, Micky and Jack just toiled on in the same old way. Jack seemed to

grudge spending anything on the land, and yet he was apparently on his way to become quite a rich man compared with the other settlers round him.

‘Perhaps he has got some great plan in his head, and he is keeping it as a surprise for us all,’ said the patient wife loyally to herself. ‘He must be putting a lot of money into the bank, and it will surely be for some good purpose. Only I wish he thought it right to tell me a little more about it now. Perhaps he is saving up to start a sawmill: I know he thought that would be a good plan in the old days; or, oh! could he be planning a visit to England?’

Kitty’s heart leapt at the thought, but she quickly put it away from her. It would be a most unbusiness-like thing to do, and a very foolish one into the bargain, when they had still their way to make here. Besides, it would be far too expensive for the two of them, and the children also. No she must leave all this guesswork, and just wait and see.

So she tended her babies, and saw to her husband’s comfort, and milked her cows, and made her cheeses—and did all to the glory of

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God, knowing that by cheerfully fulfilling these little, insignificant duties she was doing His will, and following the path marked out for her.

It had been a very solitary time for her ; for it was not so easy to get a holiday now there were two babies to look after, and somehow Jack did not seem to care so much for Mrs Manly's visits now. He made so many objections when Kitty suggested that he should bring her back with him that she did not care to press it.

It was with rather weary eyes that Kitty saw the winter days drawing in, and she wondered whether it would be possible to get Jack to take them to spend another Christmas week with their kind friends.

How long ago it seemed since last Christmas Day ! What a happy time she had had ! She longed for the warm, motherly welcome which she knew she would get from Mrs Manly, which would cheer her heart, and send her back to her work with renewed courage. She wanted to talk to her about her babies. Johnnie was now eighteen months old, and baby four months. How Mrs Manly would enjoy seeing them ! But when she ventured to suggest it to Jack, he only said : ' Well

we'll see about it,' which was not a very satisfactory answer.

The sky had been looking rather threatening for a few days, and Jack and Micky had been busy driving in the cattle to the shelter of the yard.

'I'm going to take some of them down to the market to-morrow,' said Jack ; 'there's a dealer coming who will probably take as many as I can let him have. He's buying up cattle all round the district, and he gives good prices for good beasts. I'll be away three days at the least. Be sure and don't leave the gate open this evening, Kitty, when you go to shut up your hens.'

It was still almost dark when Jack went out to the yard next morning to pick out the cattle he wished to take with him. There were two gates to the yard—one large one for carts, and one small one, close to the house, which Jack had made for Kitty's convenience when she went to attend to her poultry.

As Jack reached the small gate he noticed with vexation that it was half open, and as he stooped, to see better in the grey dawn, he distinctly saw the print of hoofs in the soft soil. He hurried to

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the herd. Three of his finest bullocks were gone! In vain he hunted through the yard, and walked round the farm, peering into the darkness of the forest to see if he could catch a glimpse of the missing cattle.

Angrily he entered the house, and called for Kitty. What did she mean disobeying him like this? Little she cared for his interests! There were the cattle gone, through her carelessness! If he went to search for them it would make him late for the market with the others.

For the first time in his life Jack showered hard words and cruel speeches upon his wife, having utterly lost his temper and his self-control.

Poor Kitty stood silent with misery before him, till the pain grew too overwhelming, and she threw her arms round his neck, sobbing out:

‘Oh, Jack, don’t; I can’t bear it! Oh, don’t be angry like that, Jack, or you’ll break my heart!’

He roughly unclasped her arms, saying: ‘It’s all very well to make all this fuss now. Let me go, will you; I can’t waste my time over you here. Crying won’t bring the bullocks back. You’d better go and try to find them yourself; it’s the least you can do to make up, I think.’

He flung himself from her, and went out to the yard. Micky joined him, and they continued the search for the bullocks. They could trace their footprints till they entered the wood, and there they were lost.

For two hours they searched in vain, and then Jack said he must go off at once with the others, or he would miss the sale altogether.

Kitty came to the door to see him off, as she always did ; but he was still in too bad a temper to try to cheer her up, and it was a very sad little face that watched him go down by the brook with the cattle, Trusty following at his horse's heels. The dog seemed to think that something was wrong, and instead of attending assiduously to his work, as he always did, he turned before they had crossed the brook, and came running back to his mistress, jumping up to try to lick her hand.

She patted his head, while a little sob escaped her. 'Good old Trusty ; kind old dog ! But you must go back to your master, and help him with the bullocks. You must be better than I was, Trusty, and not let him lose any more.'

Jack's whistle sounded through the air at that

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moment, and Trusty bounded away, obedient to the call. Kitty watched till they all disappeared from view, and waved as she saw Jack pause for a last look at the farm. To her joy she saw him wave in return, and she went in with the burden on her heart slightly lightened.

Oh, how thankful Jack was for that wave for long, long days to come!

As he went on his way with the bullocks he could not get Kitty's face out of his mind. He knew he had behaved unkindly to her, and now that his first outburst of anger was over he was deeply regretful. He would make it up when he came back, and never allow himself to offend in the same way again.

It was a long day's journey to the settlement, and he had rather to hurry the animals he was driving in order to get them safely there before dark, ready for the market next day. As his eyes wandered over the broad backs before him he especially noticed one bullock that was rather lagging behind the others.

'I hope the journey won't be too much for it,' he said to himself. 'I thought it looked a little seedy yesterday morning, but it seemed all right

again when I went out to look at them last night.'

Jack gave a start. 'When was it that he went out? Just before they went to bed. Kitty had already gone to her room, and he slipped out the last thing, just to have a look at the bullocks, to see if they were all right for the morrow. So it was *he* who left the gate open, and not Kitty! What a brute he had been!'

He made his horse stand still. He felt inclined to turn its head, and gallop back to Kitty, to apologise for his behaviour, and relieve her poor little mind; but he could not leave the cattle, and the day was already too far gone for him to delay. He would hurry back as soon as he possibly could, and make it all right with her. She was so good she would forgive him at once, and he would never give her cause for such sorrow again. He would promise her that, so she need not be afraid. He had always despised bad-tempered men, and he was not going to allow himself to fall into that failing.

Jack had not yet learnt his own weakness, or he might have added: 'God helping me.' That was again left out.

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After the midday rest, as he was starting on the second half of his journey, he missed Trusty from his side. Where could the dog have got to? It was very annoying of him to run away like this. He had never done it before. He whistled in vain, and had to do the best he could without him for the rest of the way.

He was fortunate next day in disposing of all his bullocks to the dealer at a good price, and if the bargain had only been concluded earlier would have gone on to Tims' farm to sleep the night, so as to be able to get back to Kitty early the next morning. But it was late before his turn came, and he was obliged to remain at One Fir Siding.

'Come along with me,' said Philip after the sale was over. 'We're going to have a jolly evening down at the saloon, and we want you, old fellow. So don't refuse a good offer.'

Jack's heart had been softened by the thought of Kitty's pain, and he had intended going straight to the Manly's after he had put his money safely into the bank, but now that Philip urged him he began to hesitate.

'Oh, don't come if you'd rather not,' said Philip in rather an offended tone. 'Perhaps you're afraid

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of us when you've got so much ready money in your pocket.'

'I'm not afraid of anyone,' returned Jack; 'I know exactly how far I mean to go, and can stick to it. I'm not a weak idiot who can be led about by the nose.'

'Well, then, come along, and have a game. A lot of fellows are going to be there from the market. We're going to have singing and music, and a regular good time.'

It sounded tempting to Jack after his long, monotonous evenings up at the farm, and, though he knew it was rash, he buttoned up his money inside his coat, and went off with Philip to the saloon, relying on the strength of his will to keep him out of danger.

It was full of men already, as Phil had said; and Jack was soon seated at a table, in company with some of his friends, deeply engaged in a game of euchre.

Ever since his meeting with Philip last Christmas, when he had been first introduced to the company in which he now found himself, he had been drawn deeper and deeper into the fascinations of gambling; and though he de-

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ceived himself into thinking that he could always stop if he chose he was led on and on, in the hope of winning some great stake, and retrieving the many dollars he had already lost. No wonder Black Beauty had to be sold, and the reaping-machine left unbought, when so much of the profit from the farm found its way into the pockets of his so-called friends. 'I've got a good sum this time,' Jack had said to himself that evening; 'it can't hurt me to chance just a few dollars—and who knows but I may double them, if I only have luck. I'd like to win back that colt from Phil; it would serve him right.'

The evening wore on, and the room got heated, and the men noisy. Jack had always been a temperate man, and scorned drunkenness as being one of the lowest depths to which a man can fall; but to-night the excitement of the game told upon him, and he turned oftener than usual to the glass beside him to moisten his feverish lips. He did not notice how constantly his companions refilled it during the evening, his mind was so taken up with the game.

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He was losing. Dollar after dollar had been taken out of his pocket-book, and dollar after dollar had been added to the piles which his friends were fast accumulating beside them. The spirits he had drunk were mounting to his head, and he lost his powers of self-control. One over-mastering feeling gained possession of him: he *must* win, however long he played. He lost count of time and money, until at last, on taking out his pocket-book, for about the twentieth time, he found it empty.

He stared at it in stupefied silence, until he was roused to madness by the sound of a mocking laugh from Phil.

‘You know when to stop, old man, don’t you?’

In desperation Jack leapt to his feet, and dashed the empty note-book in his tormentor’s face. An angry light flashed into Philip’s eyes; but before he could speak Jack had seized a large pewter tankard that stood on the table beside him, and hurled it after the pocket-book at Philip’s head, inflicting a deep, jagged gash across his brow. Philip threw up his arms, and dropped like a stone, the ill-gotten gains which

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he was holding in his hand falling from his loosened grasp upon the floor.

There was sudden silence in the room that had been so full of wild revel the minute before; while Jack stood, with a horrified look in his wide-open eyes, gazing at his fallen friend.

At this moment the door opened, and Mr Manly and Tims entered the room.

‘What has happened?’ asked Tims, looking round with astonishment.

Mr Manly’s face was pale, and his voice was hoarse and low with suppressed anxiety, as he stepped straight up to Jack, saying: ‘You must come at once: Kitty is lost; and the snow has begun.’

Taking him by the arm he led him from the saloon; while friendly hands raised Philip from the floor, and laid him on a couch in an adjoining room.

CHAPTER XIII

JACK'S DARK NIGHT

WHEN Jack got outside, the cold night air somewhat revived him, and he was able to ask Mr Manly what he meant by saying that Kitty was lost. Mr Manly saw that he was still in an excited state, and unable to take in the full seriousness of the situation, so he told Jack he had better come with him to his house, and they would talk over things there.

Jack felt as if in a dream. He still seemed to see Philip before his eyes, falling, with that dreadful cut upon his forehead ; and he and Mr Manly, as they walked through the fast falling snow, seemed to him only like dream figures before that grim reality.

He sat down at Mrs Manly's fireside, and hid his face in his hands, as if to shut out the sight. Mrs Manly poured out a cup of strong hot coffee for him, and made him drink it ; and then Manly came over from the chair where he had been

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sitting in silence, and laid his hand on Jack's shoulder.

'Look up, man, and listen to me,' he said in a firm, determined voice. 'You must make an effort, and try to take in what I have to say to you. This is a sad night, and we need all our energies to meet it.'

Jack glanced up into Mr Manly's face in a dazed way, and whispered rather than asked the question: 'Have I killed him?'

'I trust not,' said Mr Manly fervently; 'but, terrible though it is, we must not speak of that sad business just now; I want to tell you about Kitty.'

Mr Manly's voice was so impressive in its earnest, agitated tone that Jack was brought back to his senses, as by a sudden shock. He sat up in his chair and, looking Mr Manly straight in the face, he asked anxiously: 'Did I hear you say Kitty was lost? What does it mean?'

Tims had been sitting all this time in a dark corner of the kitchen, but Mr Manly now called him forward, and asked him to tell his tale.

'I don't know very much,' he said; 'I can only give old Micky's message. I was at the back of

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the house, sawin' wood, when my wife runs out to me in a great hurry, and screams out: "Come at once; Mrs Falconer's lost in the wood." I went into the house at once, and there I sees my wife with your little boy on her knee, kissin' of him, and cryin' over him, and Micky standin' there as white as a sheet, and his poor old hands tremblin', lookin' as if he was ready to sink into the ground with sorrow and tiredness. "Tims," he said, and I hardly knowed his voice, it was that thick and husky, "missus has been out all night, lookin' for them bullocks in the wood, and she ain't home yet. Oh dear! oh dear! what shall I do? She'll die if she ain't found soon."

' It was pitiful to see the poor old chap; he was that overcome. My wife, she made him sit down to eat something, for she found out that nothing had passed his lips for hours. And I got him quieted down; and then he told me you was down here at the market, so I said I would come and tell you about it, and get you to go up at once. He left the little boy with my wife, and went off again to Fairbrook Farm himself; for he said: "Maybe she's got home now, and is

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wantin' help, for she must be mortal cold and tired."

Jack could hardly wait till Tims had finished his story, but got up from his chair, and made ready to go.

'Will you come with me, Tims?' he said in a strained, unnatural tone as he forced himself to be calm. 'And Manly, could you get some of the fellows to come as soon as they can to search for her. I am sure they will when they know about it.'

Before he left the kitchen, he went up to Mrs Manly, who was sobbing as if her heart would break, and said: 'Oh, pray—pray as you never did before—that I may find her! God grant that we may not be too late!'

In a few minutes Tims and he were off in the now driving snow, urging their horses as fast as they dared by the light of the lanterns they both carried.

Jack never forgot the utter misery of that midnight ride. Every cold gust and icy flake seemed to penetrate the very fibres of his being as he thought of his dear, tender Kitty exposed to the wild night, wandering alone in the awful dark-

ness of the forest. 'Oh, that he might find her back at home, and safe by the warm fireside! Could he ever make enough of her when he found her again?' And then the remembrance of his parting came upon him like a stab, and he groaned aloud in agony as he thought of the sad, wistful little face at the doorway. 'Why had he not turned, and kissed away the sadness—the sadness he had caused by his false and cruel accusations? He felt that if he did find her he was only fit to fall at her feet, and beg for her forgiveness; he was not worthy to touch her. How he loathed himself, as he thought of the moment when Manly had come to him with the message, and found him with his senses almost gone through drink, and his friend smitten down by his hand! Perhaps Philip was dead by this time!'

His brain reeled as he thought of it all; and the dull thud of the horses' feet as they cantered over the snowy ground seemed to strike like sledgehammers on his heated brow, until he could hardly bear it. He felt a strange inclination to cast himself down from his saddle, and so stop the monotony of the sound; and only a strong effort of will enabled him to keep up with Tims,

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who, with a marvellous instinct, was finding out the way through the dark night.

The horses were almost spent as the grey dawn began to appear and found them within a short distance of the farm. There was a light in the kitchen window, and Jack's heart gave a leap, as he thought surely that meant she had returned. He urged his tired horse up the slope, and flung himself down at the door, while his heart beat so that he could almost hear it as he lifted the latch and went in.

No Kitty! Only a candle dying away in the socket, and poor old Micky, utterly worn out, fast asleep in the arm-chair.

He woke up with a start as Jack entered, crying out: 'Have you found her, master?' And then, as he saw Jack's pale and haggard face, he bent his white head, and sobbed aloud.

Jack made up the fire, and as they all three sat round it, waiting for the light which would enable them to renew their search, Micky told the story of the last two days.

'You know when you left that morning you'd had a few words about those three bullocks that had gone amissing.'

Jack shivered as the old man recalled the scene, and he said hastily: 'Micky, I wish I'd died before I ever spoke to my Kitty like that; and, after all, it was *I* who left the gate open, not she; so it was all my fault.'

'Well, she took on dreadfully about it after you were gone. Says she to me: "Micky, you and I must go and search everywhere for those bullocks. I can't think how I was so careless about the gate. I made so sure I had shut it. And I don't wonder Jack was vexed; they were three of the best ones, too. If we find them you might drive them down to Tims this afternoon, and go on early next morning to the market, and so they would be in time after all." "But I couldn't leave you here alone all night," says I. "Oh yes," she says, quite cheerful; "I sha'n't be a bit afraid. God can take care of me and the children, so that nothing can hurt us."'

'And she's all alone, out in the wood to-night,' groaned Jack. 'Oh, God, take care of her, for we know not what to do.'

It was the first real prayer that Jack had sent up for many a long day; but now it seemed as if the heavens above were as brass, so that his

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prayer could not reach the ear of God. A verse came into his mind that seemed to paralyse all his powers: 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.'

Micky went on: 'Well, we searched about till near twelve o'clock, and then we came in to our dinner, and she seemed very cast down that we'd not seen the bullocks. I think they must have got some fright after they got into the wood, for at one place we saw the marks of their hoofs as if they'd been running pretty hard. You see, they'd been feeding out so long in the pasture-land that they'd got rather wild, and weren't so likely to come back quickly as if they'd been kept at the farm. After dinner she says to me: "Micky, will you take care of Johnnie for a little, you're looking just tired out, and I'll have one more hunt for the beasts." She was ever that thoughtful for me, bless her gentle heart. So up she takes the baby—and I'm thankful to think she had a great thick shawl wrapped round them both—and out she goes into the wood, in the direction where we saw the hoof marks. Not long after she went in comes Trusty, all breathless with running, and

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I thought first it was you come home, but when I went to the door I could see no one; and Trusty he just snuffed about the room, and hunted through the yard, and set off after her as hard as he could into the wood. And that's the last I've seen of both of them.

'When evening came, and it began to get dark, I got frightened; but I couldn't leave Johnnie, so I just shouted from time to time as loud as I could, but no answer did I get. As it got late I just felt near crazed I was that anxious; so I wrapped Johnnie well up in her cloak, and took him in my arms, and went out with a lantern, to try if I could see anything of her. Oh, how I tramped about that night, till the boy cried so I had to bring him in, and put him to bed, or I thought he'd be ill. I dared not go very far away from the house, as I was always thinking she might come in, being guided by the light, and be afraid if she found us both gone. As soon as it was day I had another search; and then I thought I must send for you, so I got out old Whitey, and rode down to Tíms'. He was rare kind, and went off at once for you; and his missus has the little lad. I got back as

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quick as I could, hoping to see her dear face meet me at the door. I'd left a little paper on the table, saying I'd be back in a short time, in case she came in; and I'd made the fire up, and left the tea all ready, thinking if she did come she'd be too exhausted to do much for herself. But no; it was all empty still; and I've just gone round and round, and shouted and called till I could scarcely put one foot before another, and I had just to sit down in the arm-chair to take a rest. I must have fallen asleep, for I knew nothing more till you came in.'

No one spoke after old Micky finished his story, only the crackling of the fire and the ticking of Bessy's little clock broke the silence.

'I wish we had Trusty,' said Micky; 'he might have helped us to find her.'

'I'm afraid the snow will make it impossible to track her that way,' said Tims, 'or I would have got my dogs. All trace of her is gone by this time.'

Jack rose from his chair. 'Well, we'd better have a bite of something to eat, and a cup of hot tea, and then Tims and I will go out and look again. You mustn't, Micky; you're quite done up.'

You'd better stay to meet Manly when he comes with the others ; and when they arrive just blow this whistle, and I'll come back, and we'll organise regular search parties in all directions. Oh, my Kitty ! would to God you were here, not out in the cold snow !'

There had been a lull in the storm in the early morning, but now the flakes began to fall again softly, though the wind had dropped. It was not long before Manly and a good number of willing helpers rode up to the house, and Micky sounded his whistle to recall Jack and Tims. Dogs had been brought ; but, as Tims had said, they were of no use, though they were taken to the place where the hoof marks had been seen, and in which direction Micky felt sure Kitty had gone. The snow had covered everything, and the dogs had nothing to guide them.

All that day and the next they searched in vain, and one by one the men had to go back to their homes, saddened and solemnised by their fruitless errand. Mr Manly was the last to leave ; but he too was obliged to give up hope, at the end of a long week of ceaseless anxiety and sickening fear. The most they could now expect was to

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find the poor, lifeless bodies when the snow melted from the ground. The evening came at last when Jack and Micky sat down alone together in the desolate kitchen, with wearied bodies, and still more weary hearts, missing at every turn the loving, gentle presence that now seemed more precious than ever since it was taken from them.

‘I wasn’t worthy of her,’ Jack said, half to himself. ‘God gave me one of His choicest treasures to keep for Him, and I failed in my trust. Now He’s taken her away from me, and drawn her to Himself, and I’m left with an empty house, and an empty life, as a just reward for my self-will and pride. That verse is true, Micky,’ he said, pointing up to the text with the silver letters. ‘It seems to stand out like a silent witness to me every time I look up at it. “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” I tried to build by myself, and thought my own watchfulness was sufficient; but I was wrong, utterly wrong, and would that I could begin it all over again! I have left God out of my life, and now He has left me out in the cold and darkness; and I can’t blame Him. It’s only

fair, and He gave me plenty of warning before He took it all away. The light of my eyes has been taken from me at a stroke; and my character is gone for ever, for, though Phil is not dead, thank God! it was only by His mercy that I did not kill him in my evil passion, and have that weight also on my conscience to sink me deeper still. I'm outside all hope of peace or pardon—and I deserve to be left out, too.'

'Don't say that,' said old Micky; 'I know the missus would point you to the One she loved, the Good Shepherd she so often talked about, that gave His life for the wandering sheep. And I can't give up hope yet about that dear lamb of His that we've been searching for. I can't think that He's left her to perish in that cruel, cold way. She trusted Him so for everything that I believe He's shielding her yet and He'll bring her back to us. She may have wandered out of the forest some way off, and be lying ill in some person's house; or she may have fallen in with some hunters, who will take care of her. God has many ways, and He has promised not to forsake those who trust in Him.'

'Well, Micky, you and I must just stay on here

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in this desolate house for a while, and not give up the search yet, though I can't feel like you do about it. I shall wait till the snow goes, and then I must be off somewhere. I feel like Cain, sent forth from the presence of the Lord, and my punishment seems greater than I can bear. The Lord *would* have helped me, and I wouldn't let Him, and now I must be left alone in my misery.'

'We're never too far gone for the Almighty's power,' said Micky humbly; 'and *He* says: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out!" He would not have said "in no wise" if He didn't mean it.'

Jack's sleep was a very troubled one that night: one sad thread seemed to weave itself through all his dreams; the very ticking of the watch under his pillow echoed the thought that had been so vivid to his mind all the evening—that thought of all others the most hopeless—'Left out.'

CHAPTER XIV

ALONE IN THE GREAT FOREST

AND what was Kitty doing all this time? As Micky said, she had been very disheartened by their search for the bullocks turning out so unsuccessfully, and she determined after dinner to have another good look before she quite gave up. She longed to do something to please Jack, to bring back the smile to his face that she had missed so much lately. She pictured to herself how pleased he would be to see Micky ride up on old Whitey, driving the three bullocks before him, and hoped the dealer would give him an extra big price because they were such fine ones.

Where could they have got to? She would go once again to the place where they had seen the hoof marks, and see if she could not find some indication as to the direction they had taken. As she looked carefully round the spot she was pleased to find some more footprints a little farther on ;

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then some trampled-down undergrowth gave her a clue, and so, gradually led on by fresh discoveries, her hopes revived, and she pushed on yet deeper and deeper into the forest, always expecting to catch sight of the truants a little way in front of her. At last she lost the track, and had to turn back to try to find the last landmarks. In the growing darkness of the afternoon she failed to take the right direction, and wandered farther away instead of retracing her footsteps.

The forest suddenly seemed to grow cold and dark, and as she stood still, clasping her baby to her breast, the dreadful fear arose in her mind that she was lost. The great trees towered above her head, and their leaves rustled rather angrily in the evening breeze, and whichever way she looked nothing but endless vistas of moving boughs and dense foliage met her eye. The light began to wane, and the stems of the trees seemed to stand out like giant sentinels against the dark depths beyond. What should she do? She called as loud as she could; but her voice sounded so unnatural and strange in the silence of that vast forest that it almost frightened her, and she hardly dared to call again.

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What was that noise she heard among the undergrowth to her right? Something was evidently pressing through the thicket; she heard the snapping of twigs, and saw the waving of the bushes, as the creature, whatever it was, came straight towards her. It had evidently heard her call, and would soon be upon her.

She turned wildly to fly; but the thought came to her: 'Where can I go if I do run?' and she faced the danger, with her back against a friendly tree. A quick prayer went up to her heavenly Father: 'Oh, God, save me'; and a strange calm came over her as her favourite text flashed into her mind, like a voice from heaven: 'The Lord is thy Keeper.'

In a moment more, though it seemed ages to poor Kitty, the animal burst out of the bushes into the open glade in which she stood, and to her infinite relief and joy she saw it was her own faithful Trusty. The sudden revulsion of feeling was almost too much for her, and she sank down beside the dog, weeping, as she returned his boisterous greeting with grateful words and loving caresses. She could not understand how he came to be there, and the first thought was

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that Jack must have returned, and was now seeking her. She did not feel it so difficult to shout now that she had Trusty for her companion ; but though again and again she made the forest ring with her call there was no answer, except the sighing of the wind in the branches, and the flapping of a wood-pigeon's wings as it flew away, startled from its perch on a neighbouring fir-tree.

Trusty must have run away from Jack, then ! Naughty dog ! But she had not the heart to scold him, she was so thankful to have him with her. She tried to make him guide her back to the farm, and ordered him, in alternately stern and coaxing tones, to 'Go home, Trusty !' but he seemed not to take in the situation at all. He had wanted to find *her*, and now that he had attained his wish he sat in front of her, with his ears cocked, and his great tongue hanging out of his mouth, wagging his tail in the greatest good humour, ready to go with her wherever she wished. The forest did not seem half so lonely now he had come, though the light was fast going.

Kitty was a brave woman, and the wonderful

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sense of God's keeping power now helped her to remain calm, and enabled her to face her danger with a quiet mind. The sky was dark and lowering, and covered with thick clouds, so that there was no indication on which side the sun was setting, which otherwise would have been a guide to her; so she had to do the best she could without, and boldly struck out in the direction from which she believed she had come.

As it was getting almost too dark to pick her way, she came suddenly out on the edge of a small lake, surrounded by the thick forest on every side.

'I wonder if this is the lake where my black fox came from?' she said to herself. 'If so, I can't be *very* far from home—only about two hours' quick walk, I think they said. Yes; it must be here, because I remember Jack said there were trees all round, and a dense little thicket at one end, where the fox had taken up his winter quarters. I wonder if there would be shelter for me there for the night; Jack said he had such a comfortable bed of dry leaves in a cozy hollow under a fallen tree. I shall go and see, anyhow.'

She was standing close beside the edge of the thicket, and now she made her way through the

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bushes till she caught sight of the large tree lying on the ground.

‘There it is!’ she said; and sure enough, right under the trunk, just where it sprang from the great, upturned roots, was a hollow filled with dry, rustling brown leaves, quite large enough for her and Trusty to rest in comfortably. The tree had fallen alongside a mossy bank; and this formed the back of the shelter, so that there was only one side on which the cold night wind could enter. Kitty wrapped her big, warm shawl round herself and the baby as closely as she could, and making Trusty lie down at her feet, to keep them warm, she prepared to pass the night in her strange resting-place.

In one way she was glad Jack was down at the market, for she knew he would have been so very anxious about her; but she could not help feeling rather desolate with him so far away, and though she knew Micky would do the best he could, he was only a feeble old man, and had not the physical strength to scour the forest as Jack would have done had he been at home. Poor Micky! what a state of mind he would be in when she did not come back. Well, she must

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just try not to think about it, but rest as well as she could to get ready for her tramp back next morning as soon as it was light. She was getting hungry ; but, fortunately, she had put two or three thick biscuits into her pocket before she left home, as she had not felt inclined to eat much dinner ; so she contentedly ate part now, and put part aside for her breakfast. Then, committing herself and all her dear ones into her Father's care, she soon dozed off, tired out with the long wanderings of the day.

She woke early, feeling rather stiffened by the cramped position in which she had been lying ; but it was still too dark to venture out among the bushes, so she lay still, and ate her remaining biscuit, and thought of what she had better do next. She had felt quite cheered by finding herself at the old fox's den, as it made a link with home which was very comforting. She reasoned with herself that she had only to turn her back on the lake, and walk as straight as she could, in order to reach the edge of the forest.

Poor Kitty ! she did not realise that in her wanderings she had got quite to the farther side

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of the water, and that when Jack and Philip had stalked their prey the thicket had been on the opposite bank to the one on which they had first arrived. So when she at last got up, as soon as she could distinguish her surroundings, and struck out straight from the sheet of water, now looking sullen and leaden under the grey sky, she turned her back on Jack and home, and every step carried her farther and farther away. On she tramped, fast and resolutely, determined to walk on till she saw the edge of the forest before her. But it seemed a *very* long way, and though she had no idea how the hours were passing, it appeared to take much longer than she thought it would.

‘I must have gone too much to the side,’ she meditated; ‘but I can’t help it. I must just push on; it will only take me a little longer to get out of the wood and make my way back to the farm.’

She was getting dreadfully hungry too, and her limbs were beginning to ache; the baby seemed to be growing heavier and heavier, and it would keep whimpering in a fretful sort of way, which distressed Kitty greatly. But she felt her

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only chance was to keep on as long and as fast as she possibly could, so she pressed forward steadily, only resting now and then to relieve her tired feet. At last the daylight began to fade, and the dark clouds gathered still thicker in the sky. The air grew sharp and cold, with the feeling of snow in it, and Kitty's brave heart began to fail.

'What shall I do?' she said. 'I must have gone right out of my way, and I am quite lost now in this awful forest.'

She knew that it stretched away back into limitless regions in the far north, only inhabited by scattered groups of Indians or isolated fur-traders and trappers, and that one might travel for days without seeing the face of a human being, or a friendly hut in which shelter might be obtained. Still, she clung to the idea that she had, at least, started right that morning, and that, therefore, she was only keeping along the edge of the forest, so that at any moment she might see the trees grow thinner, and would emerge out of their dark shadow into the open country.

At length, however, her tired limbs refused to carry her farther, and she sat down on a mossy

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stone, utterly exhausted, beside a clear, trickling little rivulet, from which she had just quenched her thirst.

A flake or two of snow falling on her shawl caused her to rouse herself and look up. 'It's going to snow,' she said, 'and I must spend another night out.'

She pressed her baby closer to her breast as she moaned out the words. The thought of the helpless little one in her arms was agonising to her. What could she do to shield it from the bitter cold, which seemed to be increasing every moment.

The pangs of hunger were almost unbearable by this time, and she felt sick and dazed. Again she prayed: 'Oh, God, help me'; and again the comforting verse came into her mind: 'The Lord is thy Keeper.' He could keep her out here in the wilderness as well as in her little kitchen at home. It was no use trusting Him only in times of security—it was in times of danger that the need for Him was most felt, and it was *then* that He could best show His power to those who trusted in Him.

She felt that the first thing to do was to find

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some place of shelter for the night, as it was evidently going to be a stormy one. She had seated herself beside the brook, which here flowed between two high banks, leaving only a small level space on one side of the stream; and as her eye wandered round the tiny dell in which she was sitting she saw an old, gaunt tree stretching its withered, leafless branches high above her head, and in its weather-beaten trunk she discovered a large hollow cavity, into which she might creep, and safely hide till the storm was over. She got up, and looked in. The trunk was a mere shell, the inner portion having quite rotted away, and it was as dry as powder inside. Like St Paul, she 'thanked God, and took courage,' and having thus had her lodging provided for her she looked round to see what could be got in the way of food.

She had been able to pick some berries as she came along, but now she craved for something more sustaining. Why should not Trusty get something for her? 'Go, seek!' she said, and the dog began vigorously to hunt about among the ferns and brambles. A young rabbit suddenly dashed out from a sheltering nook, and scrambled

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up the bank, with Trusty after it. Hunger made the dog fleet, and in a minute or two he reappeared with the little creature in his mouth, and laid it at his mistress's feet. This was indeed food in the wilderness! Kitty almost cried for joy. She had providentially put a box of matches in her pocket the morning she left home, to keep it out of little Johnnie's way, who was trying to reach it on the table, and soon she had collected enough dry wood and leaves to make a good fire. She skinned the rabbit with the pocket-knife she nearly always carried with her (one of her wedding gifts), and soon had little bits of rabbit roasting rapidly beside the cheerful blaze. She had cut points to some thin sticks, on which she stuck portions of the meat, and, resting them against the stones with which she had surrounded the fire, they were soon sufficiently heated through to eat.

Not very nice, you will say, without salt or bread, with the outside rather burnt and the inside rather underdone; but wait till you have been twenty-four hours with hardly any food, and see if you will not agree with Kitty that it was delicious.

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She had sent Trusty off to catch another rabbit for himself ; and he seemed to have no difficulty in doing so, for soon a large fat one was brought to her by the panting dog. Most of this she gave to him as a reward for his obedience ; and once more she sent him off on yet another hunt, to secure one for the morrow's breakfast. This done, she filled the bottom of the hollow trunk with dry leaves, hung the remains of the rabbits on a branch high up out of reach of any marauding visitors, and, drawing some thick fir boughs across the opening of the cavity, she and Trusty crept inside—her baby now sleeping peacefully within the folds of the old shawl—and prepared to pass the night as best they could.

It was well they had chosen such a sheltered spot for their resting-place, for soon the storm began to rage over the forest. Thick, driving snow filled all the air, and the wind howled among the topmost branches. But Kitty and her baby were safe and dry, although the cold grew intense as the night wore on, and kept Kitty awake for many long dreary hours. As she lay in her hollow tree, Jack and Tims were on their midnight ride to Fairbrook Farm.

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As Jack sent up that first short prayer in the early morning he little thought that, though God seemed to him apparently beyond his reach, in His own way He *was* answering that agonised cry, and Kitty was being cared for, and kept in safety, though he knew it not.

CHAPTER XV

FRIENDS IN THE WILDERNESS

WHEN Kitty looked out next morning through her curtain of boughs the whole scene was one of dazzling purity.

The snow that had been falling all night had drifted deep into the little dell, and had wrapped everything in a soft, white covering. She decided that it was safer to wait in her friendly shelter until the air cleared a little. It was still bitterly cold, and even Trusty did not feel inclined to venture out while the snow was still thickly falling.

For about two hours they sat and waited, and then the lull that came in the storm to aid the searchers at the farm also brought relief to Kitty. After another meal of rabbit, both for herself and Trusty, she carefully collected all that remained of the food, and started bravely off once more on her way.

Action was the only thing that deadened the

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dull fear in her heart, and until her limbs refused to carry her farther she must persevere. She decided to follow the course of the rivulet, as she thought it surely would run in the same direction as their brook at home ; but, alas ! again, for poor Kitty's calculations, it was only a small stream flowing into one of the large rivers that intersected the forest region with a network of shining waterways, and its course was widely different from the brook that passed the farm. Every step carried her farther and farther away.

Soon the snow commenced again, and Kitty's heart began to fail her at last. The large, soft flakes blinded her, and walking became more and more difficult. Still, almost mechanically, she followed the course of the water. The rivulet joined a larger stream ; and she plodded on beside the murmuring water, which looked, oh ! so black between the banks of newly-fallen snow.

At length, as evening again drew near, the stream led her out upon the banks of a large river, winding its way among the thick, snow-laden branches of the silent and desolate forest. She had finished her last morsel of food. The

blood in her veins was becoming frozen and sluggish, and she had lost all the feeling in her numbed and weary feet. She felt stupefied with the cold, and as her eyes lighted upon this great, unknown river, so different from anything she had ever seen before, her brave spirit seemed suddenly to be broken, and she sank upon the snow-covered ground, instinctively clasping her baby still closer to her breast.

She had not even the strength to utter a prayer, she only moaned aloud to God in her misery to come and save her, and He, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground, heard His child's cry, and in the hour of her extremity sent relief.

A canoe, manned by two Indians, suddenly shot round a bend in the river, and rapidly descended the stream. Their quick eyes were not long in catching sight of the helpless figure on the bank, and kindly hands were soon raising her from the ground. They moistened her white lips with some strong cordial, and, not daring to delay because of the impending storm, they lifted her into the canoe, and were soon conveying their almost unconscious burden into a safer position in which to pass the night.

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When at last Kitty came to herself she was lying on a thick bed of dried moss, in a little hut made of rough branches, while a huge fire roared and crackled just outside, throwing a cheerful light and heat through the open doorway. She was covered with a warm bearskin, and the blood was just beginning to circulate through her chilled veins. By the fitful light of the fire she saw an Indian sitting patiently beside her, gently rubbing her frozen feet ; while another, nearer the fire, held her baby in his arms, trying to still its poor, weak little cry. At first she started as her glance fell on these wild-looking figures, wrapped in their gay blankets, with their strange, feathered head-dresses and dusky faces ; but she soon sank back in quiet contentment as she saw their kindly efforts to secure the safety and comfort of herself and her little one.

The settlers in the Canada of to-day have no reason to fear the Indians who still haunt the lonelier portions of those vast lands, where so short a time since they wandered as sole lords of the soil. The bison and the Redskin have been gradually driven farther and farther back as the white men, with their civilisation, have advanced. The

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Indian still wanders through the forest districts of the 'Great Lone Land,' though the vast prairies, with their countless herds of buffalo, have been appropriated, for the most part, by the settler; and when they come in contact with the fur-trader and the missionary, the only other inhabitants of these regions, it is as peaceful hunters and trappers, gaining a precarious livelihood by their fishing and shooting, and bartering their furs in exchange for guns and axes, and other articles displayed to them at the store of the trader.

Kitty had not had the opportunity of seeing many of her Indian neighbours before, but she knew she need not fear now she was in their hands, but rather thank God for having sent them in her way. She was too weak to think much; but after having received a little food from her kind helpers, and taken her poor baby into her now strengthened arms, she fell into a long, dreamless sleep, from which she did not wake until the morning.

When she got up and left the hut she found the two Indians patiently waiting for her by the side of the still smouldering fire. They seemed

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relieved to see her appear, and after supplying her with some dried meat they evinced the greatest anxiety to start off again at once on their voyage. In vain Kitty tried to make them understand her situation, and repeated, as clearly and distinctly as she could, the names of several of the largest settlements near One Fir Siding, hoping that one at least would strike familiarly on their ears. But they only shook their heads, as they looked up to the sky, still heavy with threatening clouds, and then pointed down the river, holding up eight fingers before her, as if to indicate the length of time which would elapse before they reached their destination. What this might be Kitty knew not; but anyhow it was better than being left out here alone in the forest again, and she might, perhaps, find someone there who could understand her, and help her to get back to her own home; so she gratefully took her place in the bottom of the canoe, and put herself unreservedly into the care of her Indian friends.

It seemed a long eight days to poor Kitty as she sat in her cramped position, hour after hour, watching the banks with their never-ending fringe of dark forest and thick undergrowth. After two



SHE PUT HERSELF UNRESERVEDLY INTO THE CARE OF
HER INDIAN FRIENDS.

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days of travelling, the river down which they were going joined a still larger one, and the canoe was turned up the stream. It was hard work paddling against the current with the double burden, and the men took turns in managing it. One of them was a grave, pleasant-looking man, with a gentle, kindly manner; the other was much younger, hardly more than a boy, with a fund of energy that seemed inexhaustible. Sometimes the lad would shoot a wild duck as it flew past, and once he managed to kill a deer that had come down to the river to drink; but the elder man would allow no excuse for delay, and pressed on steadily. Trusty spent his time either curled up in the canoe, or running beside them on the bank.

The Indians were evidently very anxious to continue their journey as quickly as possible, for it was late in the season to be travelling by canoe, and they wished to reach home before the winter set in and the lakes and rivers began to freeze. This early snow-storm had evidently overtaken them as they were returning from a hunting expedition up one of the tributary rivers, and the time had come when the light birch canoes would have to be exchanged for snow-shoes and dog-

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train during the long months when icy winter held sway over the land.

Every night they made Kitty as comfortable as they possibly could by the side of the roaring fire, which they kindled as soon as they had drawn up their canoe upon the bank, and she had no lack of meat with which to satisfy her hunger. But as day after day passed she could not help feeling more and more lonely and desolate; she felt that every day was bearing her farther away from home; and as the country grew wilder, and the cold became greater, the thought of her utter helplessness almost overwhelmed her at times.

There was one thing, however, that comforted her more than anything else, and this was the fact that, whenever she knelt, as she always did morning and evening, to commit herself into God's keeping, she noticed that both her guides would reverently uncover their heads until she rose from her knees. They never knelt with her, but she felt sure, from their silent testimony, that they had been in contact with the missionary of the Gospel, from whom they had learnt at least some slight knowledge of the Christians' God, and this helped more than anything else

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to keep up her courage and increase her faith. She knew how these noble messengers of truth had penetrated far and wide into those trackless regions, bearing the news of Christ's salvation to the scattered tribes, and she felt that here at least was one bond of union between them. She trusted that, as a knowledge of the God who heareth prayer had reached these poor, ignorant Indians, so surely would the God who answereth prayer be present to perform His promises. Mrs Manly's words often came to comfort her in her long, strange voyage : ' You can't be lost if you're in the Good Shepherd's arms.'

At last, on the eighth day, the snow began again, and in earnest this time. Kitty thought she would have frozen, as the bitter wind went through her like a knife, and even the banks on each side of the river were almost blotted out from sight by the thick clouds of snow that whirled past them. Fortunately, the wind was for the most part behind them, and thus aided rather than hindered them in their struggle onward. At length, through the falling snow, Kitty thought she saw an opening in the forest, just in front of them ; and the current became

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exceedingly strong, almost threatening to overwhelm the frail boat. The men exerted themselves to the utmost, and urged the canoe through the black rush of the water, till, after a few moments of anxious suspense, they suddenly slid into comparatively still water, and both the men gave grunts of extreme satisfaction.

The elder man said some words to her which she did not understand, but by his tone, and the repeated pointing of his finger towards a low line of dark wood in the distance, she gathered that they would soon be at their journey's end. They had evidently entered the waters of a small lake, and were obliged to keep near the shore in order to avoid getting into the full strength of the wind.

An hour more of weary paddling, and the short daylight was nearly gone. Kitty felt as if she were in a dream, a sort of nightmare, in which she was condemned to travel unceasingly. The regular splash of the paddles, and the muffled roar of the wind through the falling snow, seemed fitting accompaniments to the strange thoughts that wandered through her weary brain.

She was roused from her state of stupor by a

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loud shout from the boy, which was immediately answered by a vehement barking of dogs upon the shore, and in a few minutes the canoe had touched the beach. Kitty felt herself raised in strong arms, and carried rapidly up the bank. She felt dazed with the cold, and utterly unable to take in what was going on around her. She was only conscious of dark forms pressing near in the falling snow, and a confused babel of voices in an unknown tongue. She knew no more till she found herself in a small circular hut, with a bright fire burning in the centre of the floor, and a dirty old Indian woman bending over her, with some hot drink in her hand, which she was endeavouring to induce Kitty to swallow. Mechanically Kitty did so, and as the warmth began gradually to creep over her again she tried to take in a few more details of her surroundings as well as she could for the thick smoke which filled the place. She discovered afterwards that there was a small hole in the centre of the roof, which was intended to serve as a chimney, but a great deal of the smoke certainly remained below.

Very poor and dirty it all seemed. An old man was crouching over the fire at the other side

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of the hut, and littered about the floor was a strange assortment of household goods—bear-skins and deerskins, snow-shoes and bow and arrows, and a few cooking utensils, dried fish, and other accessories to an Indian's life. But the face of the old squaw, though grimy and wrinkled, had a kind smile upon it, and they were very motherly hands that laid Kitty down again upon the heap of unsavoury skins on which she was lying, and Kitty smiled back at her in quiet content. Trusty was lying, as usual, at her feet, and her baby was safe in her arms, so she allowed herself to drop off to sleep, thankful to have a roof over her head on such a wild night as this, even though that roof were only an Indian wigwam.

Next morning she awoke refreshed, and was able to join the old man and his wife in their early meal of fresh fish from the lake. After their simple breakfast, to Kitty's surprise, the old man took out a well-worn book from a box of gaily-painted wood, in which it was evidently kept as a cherished treasure. The old woman nodded and smiled as Kitty showed her astonishment, and touched first the book, and then Kitty's

cheek, as if to show that it had come to them from a white man. After he had slowly and haltingly read a few lines from the book, what was Kitty's joy and surprise to see the old man and his wife kneel down on the dirty floor of that poor wigwam, while he bowed his head, and offered up a short prayer in a reverent and earnest tone, his face meanwhile beaming with quiet joy.

Kitty burst into tears, and, kneeling down beside them, she mingled her prayers with his, and the supplications of the English heart ascended with the Indian's prayer to the throne of the heavenly Father, to whom all nations are as one.

Kitty longed to talk to the quiet old couple who so kindly sought to minister to her wants; but signs are a limited language, and she was not able to learn much from them. The morning was not a very comfortable one for Kitty, for nearly the whole time the door of the hut was filled with men, women, and children, crowding up to see the strange, white-faced woman, and though all were good-natured and cordial in the highest degree, it was a very trying ordeal for poor, tired Kitty.

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In the afternoon the elder of her two guides appeared with a tall, intelligent young hunter, who, to her infinite relief, was able to speak a few words of English, and she was able to satisfy herself on many points. He had seen a good deal of the fur-traders, and had also travelled with one of the missionaries on his long journeys to outlying tribes, so he could answer a good many of her questions.

The encampment in which she found herself was a small one, of about eighty people, on the banks of a lake, several hundred miles from any white settlement. There was one a long way down the river up which she had come, and some of the Indians went there every spring to sell the furs they collected during the winter. The river was now impassable for canoes, but when the winter was over they would take her down to the white men. She was welcome here, for they loved the white man's God. The missionary had told them about Him when he came to visit them. They had His book, and one or two could read it. The old man in whose hut she sat was a chief among them, and he had gladly taken her in. They had buried their own daughter many moons

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ago, and he wanted to be a father to her while she was among them. So she need not fear.

Kitty's heart was indeed thankful for all the kindness she had received, and though she dreaded the long winter, with its banishment from Jack, and home, and all the comforts of civilisation, she yet praised God for His great goodness in leading her to this safe resting-place in the wilderness, where she had found a shelter among humble fellow-disciples of her own Lord and Master.

CHAPTER XVI

KITTY MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

WE must pass over the long winter, with its days of storm and sunshine, which Kitty passed in the care of her friends of the wigwam. Often did her heart yearn to overleap the distance between her and the little farm by the brook, where she pictured Jack in his loneliness, mourning for her as dead. She wondered if he had sent Johnnie to the care of Mrs Manly, who she knew would gladly receive him, for her sake as well as his own. She, of course, had heard nothing of the sad events that took place on the night she was lost, and knew not that old Micky reigned alone at the farm ; while Jack was far away, seeking relief from his own thoughts in new scenes and among new people.

Often did she go on fine days to the edge of the frozen lake, and look across it to the south, where lay the home she longed for ; but she tried to wait patiently, and busied herself to help her

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kind hosts as much as possible. The old chief's wife was getting very frail, and Kitty was able to do many things to ease her; for the Indian woman's life is a hard one at best, even in those homes where Christianity has found an entrance. Kitty learnt a good many words from the young hunter who had first been her interpreter, and was soon able to make herself understood in a fashion, though signs still formed a goodly part of the conversation. The two men who had been the means of saving her from a lonely death were constant in their care for her, and many a venison steak and wild-fowl stew were to be traced to their thoughtfulness and skill.

She made great friends with some of the younger women, who took the greatest interest in Kitty and her child. They could not get over their surprise at the way in which the baby was dressed. The little Indian "papoose" has no elaborate baby clothes prepared for its reception. A long wicker-work sort of basket is its only cradle, and when this has been filled with soft, dry moss the bare, little brown body is laid upon it, and covered up with the same material. Over this an old shawl or blanket is perhaps laid, and the basket

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is then laced across with thongs, only the little flat face peeping out at the top, with its straight black hair and dark, solemn eyes. Most convenient when the mother has to fetch wood or catch fish or go upon a journey, for baby is safely strapped on behind her back, and she is free to use her hands as she will. More convenient still when she is at home, and can just hang the cradle on the bough of a neighbouring tree, while she makes the fire and cooks the dinner, knowing that the baby cannot fall out, and that it is out of reach of the numerous wild and thievish dogs that roam at will about every Indian encampment. In spite, however, of much well-meant advice from many mothers, little Gracie still remained free to kick her small limbs, though Kitty had to take the greatest care to cover her up well whenever she took her outside the warm hut, lest she should get frost-bitten in the freezing air.

Long and dreary were the winter days; but at last the frost grew less intense, and with the increasing heat of the sun the snow on the branches began to melt, and the ice on the lake became unsafe to walk on because of the great cracks which appeared upon its surface. And

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then, with the rapidity which characterises the advent of an Indian spring, in a few days the whole scene had changed. Instead of the smooth, white sheet of solid ice which had for so long covered the lake there was a wide expanse of bright blue water rippling in the sunshine; the trees seemed to burst into sudden foliage, and the ground was strewn, as if by magic, with brilliant, many-coloured flowers. The cry of the wild geese was heard overhead, and ducks and teal nested among the reeds by the water's edge. Everything rejoiced in the warm sunshine. There was joy and feasting in the huts of the Indians; for winter with its icy grasp was over, and the plenty of summer was at hand.

At last there came a day when the hunters of the tribe collected together the furs and skins which they had so laboriously procured by trap and rifle during the long winter, and they were piled in the canoes, ready to be carried southward to the fur-traders' store.

The time had come at length when Kitty might again turn her face homeward, and look forward to a speedy meeting with her husband and her boy. She hardly dared to allow herself to think

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what it would be ; it seemed to stir such depths of happiness within her that it was almost pain.

And yet, in spite of the bright prospect before her, it was with true feelings of sorrow that she left the Indian encampment by the lake. Tears blinded her eyes as she kissed the old chief and his wife, who had been father and mother to her in a foreign land, and the whole tribe assembled on the shore to bid her farewell. Never did she forget the scene. When the canoes left the beach a wail of sorrow went up from the kindly people, and as the huts among the trees grew smaller and smaller in the distance, and individual figures faded from her view, although she was truly thankful that this strange chapter in her history was now ended, she felt that her life was richer for the wonderful lessons of love and trust which she had learnt in her sojourn by the lonely lake among the woods.

The journey down was far quicker and more enjoyable than the journey up. To begin with, she was going home, and that, in itself, made all the difference. The air was balmy and warm, and the canoes skimmed down the current like wild birds on the wing. She was not so cramped

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either, for she was in a large boat, manned by four Indians, and the furs made a luxurious couch on which to rest.

After a few days of rapid journeying they came in sight of the wooden buildings, with high surrounding stockades, which formed the Fort of the fur-traders, and as they drew up to the little landing-stage to Kitty's delight the first voice she heard was an English one. What comfort those words brought to her heart, though they were so unromantic and commonplace: 'Look sharp, Bill, here's a canoe!'

When they saw Kitty, and heard her story, they could not do enough to show their sympathy. She was given the best room in the Fort, and feasted with the choicest that their stores could produce. She thought no bed had ever been so comfortable as the one she slept in that night. After months spent in an Indian wigwam everything seemed the very essence of luxury. To sit at a table with a table-cloth, and eat meat with a knife and fork, instead of squatting on the floor to eat it with her fingers was a treat she had not been accustomed to lately, and she appreciated it accordingly.

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From the traders she learnt that she was still very many miles from Fairbrook Farm, the course of the river on which the Fort was built going far to the east of that district. Fortunately, one of their large boats was going down the river next day, and it would take her as far as the place where she could join the railway—a newly-made branch of the Canadian Pacific line—from which she could easily get to One Fir Siding.

It was with strange feelings that she saw the signs of civilisation gradually become more and more apparent during this last journey down the wide river; and when she got out at the busy wharf, where the old, wild life of the woods met the advancing tide of commerce and enterprise, and touched hands with the spirit of progress from the east, she felt quite dazed and bewildered by the unwonted noise and bustle.

A new difficulty now arose. Money had been an unknown thing to her for so long that, until she saw the station buildings, and heard the whistle of a locomotive, the idea of her penniless condition had not presented itself to her mind. One of the traders had been in charge of the

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boat coming down, and she was sure he would advance her fare to her, but she hardly liked to ask such a thing from an utter stranger.

What should she do? If she sent a letter it would be a day or two before she could get an answer either from Jack or Mr Manly; and what could be done in the meanwhile? Suddenly she recollected that she was now in reach of a telegraph office. How strange it seemed as she realised this, after the isolation and primitive ways of the last few months. She would wire to Mr Manly, and ask him to send her some money, as he would be sure to be at the station, and Jack might not get the message for a long time if he were up at the farm.

But how could she get the money for the telegram? She would not mind asking the trader for this; so she seated herself on a log of wood on the wharf to wait till the boat was unloaded and he had more leisure to attend to her.

As she sat there, in spite of her perplexities, she could not help noticing the movements of a small boy, who was taking the greatest interest in the unloading of the cargo. He could not have been much more than four years old; but

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he was evidently of an adventurous disposition, and possessed of an inquiring mind. Kitty wondered how his mother could allow him to come down alone to the bustling wharf; but the little fellow seemed evidently well able to take care of himself. He skilfully avoided being knocked over by the rush of busy men, and managed to dodge in and out among the great bales of goods until he was right at the end of the wharf, and was able to get a good view of the boat.

To Kitty's dismay he then proceeded to seat himself on the extreme edge of the quay, with his little brown legs dangling over the water. She went up to him, and suggested that it would be well if he took a safer seat a little farther back.

'I'se all right, thank you,' replied the small boy, looking up with the sweetest smile; while he gave a little wriggle, that almost sent Kitty's heart into her mouth, he was so nearly over.

Where had she seen that round, merry face before, with those dancing blue eyes, that seemed so full of life and mischief?

Before she had time to speak again a firm hand

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suddenly seized hold of him from behind, and he was withdrawn rapidly from his perilous position.

‘You naughty monkey!’ said a buxom young woman as she dragged the delinquent on to his feet and gave him a little shake. ‘How dare you go so near the water? You sha’n’t have any of my nice jam tarts for supper to-night, I can tell you; they’re not for naughty boys!’

Kitty made a quick step forward. She knew now where she had seen those blue eyes before. It was Mrs Bent’s baby!

Mrs Bent knew her in a moment, and exclaimed with delight: ‘Why, Kitty, who would have thought to see *you* here! I *am* pleased, that I am! Just you come right away, and have a cup of tea with me; I was getting it ready when I missed this little bundle of mischief, and had to fly after him, for there’s no knowing where he’ll be off to if you just give him one minute’s start.’

‘You can’t tie him to your apron string now,’ said Kitty, laughing, ‘though even then he used to get away sometimes.’

‘I always said he was a bit of quicksilver;

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but he's getting twenty times worse every year of his life,' replied Mrs Bent. 'You think he's safe beside you, and before you can turn round he's off and away. One day he's nearly under the train, and another day he's almost drowned in the river; and he never cares a button—not he. His father says he thinks he must have been born to be hanged, he's that clever in escaping everything else.'

How Kitty enjoyed that cup of tea in Mrs Bent's parlour, and how interested Mrs Bent was in hearing Kitty's adventures!

When Kitty asked her to lend the money for the telegram, 'Don't do it,' she said; 'when my husband comes in he'll gladly lend you enough to pay your fare, and you just go and take them by surprise, and walk right in upon them all. Oh, what wouldn't I give to be at your back the first minute!'

When Mr Bent came in his wife made Kitty tell her whole story over again, while he listened with breathless attention.

'Well, I never!' he said when she had finished her account; 'it beats Robinson Crusoe, and all the other stories I ever heard in my life. I

wonder you haven't come back with your hair turned white. *You* wouldn't have liked it, Jennie, old woman. I can't imagine you and Bobby in an Indian wigwam. My word, what a state I'd have been in if it had been you! I'm right sorry for your husband, Mrs Falconer. Though I only saw him for a minute or two, as we were leaving the ship, he took my fancy wonderful.'

Kitty's heart glowed as she heard her husband mentioned. What a happy meeting that had been on the ship! But this one!—oh, how infinitely more beautiful it would be!

There was no train till early morning, so Kitty had to curb her impatience as best she could, and the Bents were only too pleased for her to stay.

'Where are my nice tarts?' Mrs Bent suddenly exclaimed as she got up to set the table for supper. 'I had made eight beauties, and now there are only two!'

There was no answer. Mr and Mrs Bent both turned instinctively towards their son and heir, who was sitting on a little stool by the fire. He had been wonderfully still for some time past, playing with his wooden soldiers. There was a suspicious look of innocence upon his face as he

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applied himself closely to the difficult task of making a wounded soldier stand upright on only half a leg.

‘Bobby,’ said his mother severely, ‘come here to me. Where are those tarts?’

He got up from his stool, and stood on the hearthrug, his pretty golden curls framing the sweet baby face—a regular little cherub in disgrace. Suddenly his eyes fell upon the plate with the two remaining tarts, which his mother was holding out, to emphasise the enormity of the transgression, and a seraphic smile broke out over the rosy face. He put his curly head a little on one side, and clasping his chubby hands before him in an ecstasy of remembrance, he looked up to his mother, and sighed out the words: ‘Oh, mammy, they was *so* nice!’

It was impossible not to laugh. So Bobby got off lightly this time, and, wonderful to state, his impromptu supper seemed to do him no harm.

The next stage in Kitty’s journey was a very uneventful one, though everything she passed seemed to her a cause for wonder after her ex-

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periences in the lonely backwoods. The train seemed very noisy and jolty after the pleasant motion of the canoe. But what cared she?—every jolt was bringing her nearer to Jack and home.

CHAPTER XVII

GATHERING UP THE THREADS

MRS MANLY was standing at her cottage door. The hollyhocks in her garden were casting long shadows across the path, and she was shading her eyes from the level rays of the sun to enable her to see better up the village street. Soon her lips parted in a smile, and she walked to the little gate, throwing it open to admit a tall young man, with a pale, thin face, who was carrying a jolly, sturdy little boy upon his shoulder.

‘Well, Philip,’ said Mrs Manly, ‘I hope you’ve not quite tired yourself out with that little fellow. You’ve been away a long time.’

‘He wanted to see the ducks on the big pond, so we’ve been sitting there a good while; haven’t we, Johnny?’

‘He’s a dear little duck himself,’ said Mrs Manly, taking him in her arms. ‘It just goes to my heart to think that he has neither father nor

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mother to watch his pretty ways ; for I don't think his father will ever come back here again—if he's still alive, that is to say. I can't get his face out of my mind, Philip ; it was so drawn and miserable when he went away. Often and often at nights I wake up with a start, and think I see him as he looked when he heard the whistle of the train that was to take him away. He was sitting in my kitchen waiting for it, and as he got up he just said : " Well, Mrs Manly, good-bye. If ever a man had a chance it was I, and I've wrecked it all by my own hand ; there's nothing left for me now but utter darkness." And then he shook my hand, and thanked me for all I'd done, and kissed little Johnnie. " Be a better man than your father, laddie," he said, " and don't try, like he did, to do without God." And with that he was gone. Oh, Philip, it near breaks my heart to think of it all.'

Philip stood leaning against the gate, with his head bent down, unconsciously pulling a daisy to pieces that Johnnie had stuck in his button-hole.

' Don't speak of it, Mrs Manly,' he said : ' I can't bear it.'

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He threw the bare stalk of the daisy on the ground with a despairing gesture. 'I can't ever forget the share I had in it all,' he said; 'there's a deal of it lies on my shoulders. I spoilt those lives, just as I've spoilt that poor, harmless daisy there, that was growing so happy in the fields only an hour ago.'

'You mustn't let it weigh too heavy on you, Phil,' returned Mrs Manly gently. 'You've laid the burden on the shoulders of the Great Burden-bearer, and you know He won't let you bear it alone.'

'No; I know that, Mrs Manly,' said Philip; 'it's the only thing that comforts me. If it hadn't been for you pointing me to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, I don't know what I should have done.'

Mrs Manly looked up compassionately at the sad face before her, and repeated, half to herself, those wonderful words: 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

'I know the meaning of that verse now,' said Philip; 'it's all true, every word of it, first and

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last. "The iniquity of us *all*." That means *my* sin too; and I know He has forgiven me, but the consequences of that sin seem always hanging over me like a cloud.'

'Yes,' said Mrs Manly; 'that's the sad part. I've often felt that. The doing is easy, but you can't *undo*.'

'I was that mad with Jack,' Philip went on; 'he was getting on so well, and he had won Kitty, too, after she had refused me, and I wanted to bring him down a bit. But I didn't mean to go so far, and injure him as I did. And then I can't help feeling that if he hadn't been so upset and worried by losing so much money he would never have made that fuss about the lost bullocks, and been so sore vexed with poor Kitty that she felt driven to go and look for them. I'd give all I possess to have them both back again as they were in that happy time before I came and spoilt it all.'

As they both stood thinking sadly of the past Mr Manly joined them in the garden. There was a back door on the other side of the cottage leading straight on to the platform, so that they had not seen him come in.

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‘Why, Walter,’ said his wife, ‘what has happened to you? You look as if someone had left you a fortune at least.’

‘A thousand times better than a fortune!’ said Mr Manly, his face radiant with delight. ‘Who would you like best in all the world to find in your kitchen just now?’

Mrs Manly gave a start. ‘Oh, Walter, it can’t be—surely it can’t be Kitty?’

‘Just you go and see, my dear. If it’s not Kitty it’s somebody wonderfully like her,’ said Mr Manly triumphantly.

Mrs Manly needed no second bidding. In a minute more she was sobbing on Kitty’s neck with sheer joy and happiness. It was some time before any of them could talk connectedly—it all seemed so strange and wonderful. Philip had slipped quietly away after the first greeting with Kitty was over.

‘It’s a miracle!’ said Mrs Manly, still sobbing spasmodically. ‘It’s life from the dead, blessed be God! To think that we’ve been mourning over your poor, lost body for all those months, and now you and the babe are sitting in my own kitchen, looking better than you’ve done for many

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a long day! Oh, why isn't Jack here to have his heart rejoiced too!'

'Where is Jack?' asked Kitty anxiously. She had been so living in the hope of seeing him at once, and now Mrs Manly spoke of him as if he were far away. A cold fear seized her heart.

'No, dear, he's not dead—don't you think that,' replied Mrs Manly; 'but he was that broken-hearted at the thought of you being lost that he couldn't bear to stay on at the place, and so he went off to the gold-diggings with a young fellow who was just on the point of starting from here when Jack gave up the search for you. He said one place was as good as another to him now—he only wanted to get away—and it didn't matter to him where he went, or what became of him. Poor fellow! I wish we could let him know about this joyful day!'

'But why not?' asked Kitty. 'Can't we write to him, and tell him to come back at once?'

'We don't know where he's gone, dear—that's the difficulty. The young fellow he went with came back in a month or two, quite out of heart with the whole thing. They'd had lots of hard-

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ships, and hardly any success, and he thought he would be far better at home. But Jack, he said he couldn't go back, so he went off somewhere farther west, to a wilder part of the country. He seemed so restless he could settle to nothing, so it was said.'

This *was* a blow to Kitty. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick—and she had so counted on seeing Jack in a few hours! But God had restored her in such a marvellous manner to her home that she felt she must trust Jack to Him too. God knew where he was, with his sad, lonely heart; and He could find him for her, though no one else could. Sorrow and deep thankfulness were mingled together as she praised God for the past, and tried to lay the future trustfully in His Almighty hands.

She was delighted with little Johnnie, he had grown so big and strong. 'I knew you would take charge of him, Mrs Manly,' she said. 'I never feared a bit for him. It was always my poor Jack that I was worrying about; I knew he'd take on so.'

If Mr and Mrs Bent had been interested in hearing of Kitty's adventures, the circle in Mrs

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Manly's kitchen was doubly entranced as the whole history of the dreadful days in the forest and the strange life in the Indian encampment was told round the fire that evening.

Mrs Manly could not get over the idea of Kitty living in the midst of such wild, uncivilised people for so long. 'How you ever could have stood all the dirt and discomfort I can't think,' she said—'you who are so particular about everything, too.'

'But they were dear, kind people in spite of the dirt,' said Kitty. 'I loved my old chief and his wife, and I wish I could do something to show my gratitude to them. When I said to Mr Bent that I wanted to make them a present, and send them some little comforts, he told me he would be glad to get them forwarded for me. He is in the timber trade, and he can easily get a message sent to my old friends by some of the Indians who float the logs down, or else by the fur-traders at the Fort. So when Jack comes home, and I can get some money, I must make a nice, long list of things they really want, and send a good big bundle to them. They will be so pleased, dear old people ; and I certainly owe

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them more than I can ever repay, they were so good to me in my loneliness.'

It was not till next morning that Mrs Manly told Kitty the story of Jack's fall, and Philip's share in it. Philip had asked her to tell Kitty all about it, as he thought she ought to know, and yet he felt he could not face the ordeal of confessing it himself. At first Kitty was indignant at the way in which Jack had been enticed into evil, and was inclined to put all the blame on Philip; but Mrs Manly was a just woman, and, much as she loved Jack, she could not hear another wrongfully accused.

'No, Kitty; we mustn't put it all on Philip, for great as his fault was in acting the part of a tempter, still it was Jack's own weakness that led him into sin, and he feels that strongly himself, poor fellow.'

'He must have been unhappy for long,' said Kitty, 'when he saw things were going wrong. Now I know why he used to be so short with me when I asked him anything about money matters, and why my poor Black Beauty had to be sold: he was just getting into a sort of net, and being entangled in it, and he was miserable

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about it. I can't help wondering how he ever allowed himself to be drawn in, he was so strong and so wise, Mrs Manly.'

'Jack has found out why it was, Kitty. He knows now the mistake he made in relying on his own strength and not God's. We don't know how weak the strongest of us are till we fall; and sometimes God has to give us a hard lesson to show us that we can't do without Him, either for life or for death. Perhaps all this sorrow about you will just be the means of bringing him to God.'

'I would not mind what I suffered if that could come to pass,' said Kitty earnestly. 'I always felt that was the one thing in which Jack and I had nothing in common. We must put that in our prayers too, Mrs Manly—that God will not only bring Jack back to us, but that he may be brought back to God as well.'

'God has taught Philip that lesson,' said Mrs Manly; 'he is like a different man now. At first I felt like you do about it, Kitty; and when I heard how ill he was from the blow Jack gave him, I thought it served him right. But God showed me that this was not the spirit

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which Jesus would have had about it ; so I asked Him to make me forgiving and gentle, and then went straight up to the place where he was lying, delirious with brain fever, and no one to look after him properly. And I tell you, Kitty, I just felt rebuked when I saw him, and thought how near I was to letting a poor, erring fellow-creature go out of the world without trying to do something to save him, body or soul. So I got him moved up here, and did what I could to nurse him back to life again. He was so grateful to me, and so cast down in spirit when he came to himself and heard all that had happened, that I was really sorry for him, poor lad. He felt he'd wrecked your happiness, and Jack's too, and all through his wicked spite and pride. But at last he got to know, by his own experience, how tender the Good Shepherd is to the lost and wandering sheep ; and he's so grateful to the Lord for receiving him, and so humble when he thinks of his own unworthiness, that he can't do enough for Him.'

'Oh, how I long for Jack to feel that too !' cried Kitty ; 'how happy we should all be then !'

'God grant it,' said Mrs Manly with fervour.

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‘Philip is just praying night and day that Jack may learn the same blessed lesson. After he saw you yesterday he said to me as he was going out: “God has done more for us than we ever thought possible in bringing Kitty back to us, and I feel sure He will answer our prayer about Jack too.”’

Mrs Manly did not tell Kitty how it was her devoted nursing, under God, that had pulled Philip through that terrible time of illness, and that it was owing to her unselfish, self-denying spirit that Jack was spared the awful consequences that might have followed his ungoverned deed. Patiently and carefully she had watched over Philip and tended him, and when the poor, weakened body began to regain strength and life again she did all she could to lead the precious soul into a yet fuller and more glorious life, even the life of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. How thankful she felt that she had not yielded to her first hard thoughts, but that God had helped her to bring back one of His lost ones.

Mrs Manly wished to persuade Kitty to stay some time at One Fir Siding, but Kitty was anxious to get home.

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‘Just think if Jack *were* to come back, and not find me there!’ she said. ‘I must go and get everything in order, so as to be quite ready when he comes. It would never do if things were allowed to get behind at the farm now that I’m so near home.’

‘How rejoiced old Micky will be to see you,’ said Manly; ‘he’s never given up hope of you all through those long, weary months. I’ve been up every now and then to see how he was getting on, and it’s wonderful what the old man has done. He stayed on all alone during the winter, and when the work got too much for him in the spring we thought it best to send up another hand to help him through the busy time. Jack told me to do what I thought best when he went away. He seemed not to have the heart to think of anything. “Keep it up for the boy’s sake,” he said; “he may need it later.”’

‘We must do all we can to get a message to him somehow,’ said Kitty; ‘and he’ll find the farm all ready waiting for him when he comes back. Perhaps we’ll hear of him through some of the miners, if only we make inquiries enough.’

Philip had asked to be allowed to drive Kitty

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and Mrs Manly up to Fairbrook Farm; and when the morning came for them to start, what was Kitty's surprise to see Black Beauty harnessed to the light buggy that was waiting for them at the door. He was looking well and sleek, and had not forgotten the way to ask for bread and carrots when Kitty came to his side to admire and pat him.

Philip came up to her as she stood beside the horse, and while he busied himself in brushing some imaginary dust off the glossy coat, he said in a nervous and rather shamefaced way: 'Kitty, I know Mrs Manly told you that I was the cause of Jack selling Black Beauty, as we'd been gambling so much together. I feel he's not lawfully mine at all—it really was a sort of robbery—and the least I can do is to give him back to you. He has been well broken in to harness this winter, and I hope you'll find him useful. And if you'd be as good as to accept the buggy, I'll be so very grateful, Kitty. It's only what is due to you; and I thought it would let you get down oftener to see your friends here without having to wait for one of the carts.'

Kitty began to thank him, but he turned away

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hastily, saying: 'Please, Kitty, don't. There is nothing to thank me for; it's only what ought to have been yours all the time.'

Kitty could hardly believe it when they arrived in sight of the familiar log-house nestling among the trees. Black Beauty drew them so swiftly along that it seemed only half the distance it used to be.

Micky had heard the good news of Kitty's arrival from Mr Tims, so he was prepared for her. The good old man almost wept for joy when she entered the kitchen. 'Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!' were the only words he could utter as he held her hands in both his trembling ones and looked once more into the sweet, fresh face that he had missed so sorely.

It was not long before Kitty got back into all her old ways, and with the willing, hearty assistance of her two helpers the work of the farm went on busily. The three bullocks that had caused so much trouble had returned when the snow came; but Micky could not bear to see them, and had sold them at the next market, buying instead some yearling calves to fatten during the summer. All had been carefully and

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lovingly attended to, and soon the only thing lacking at the farm was the presence of its master. For this Kitty and Micky never failed to pray, as they knelt each evening in the little kitchen to seek God's blessing after the day's work was done.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FAR COUNTRY

IN another portion of that great northern land of Canada the sun was setting over the rocky walls of Grizzly Bear Gulch. A few years ago this wild gorge had been tenanted only by birds of prey, and by the grim beast that gave its name to the place. But man had come into these silent fastnesses in search of gold, and the monarch of the gorge had been slain, as he sought to resist the bold intruders. Now instead of the whirr of wild wings and the growl of savage beasts the sound of pickaxe and shovel were heard on every side. Men had flocked to the spot expecting to find an El Dorado, and in many cases their expectations had not been in vain. Mines had been sunk, and shafts dug, and the rocks had been made to yield up their golden treasure. A whole town of little wooden huts had sprung up near by, and there was no lack of stir and bustle in the busy valley.

On the evening of which we speak the miners had not yet left their work, there being still a few moments of daylight in which to prosecute their eager search for gold, and but one solitary figure was making its way across the rough hillocks that separated the claims from the little town beyond.

The man's step was slow, and his whole manner dejected and depressed. If a stranger had seen him as he walked homeward, with his tools upon his shoulder and his eyes fixed upon the ground before him, they would at once have concluded that here was a man who had been disappointed in his desires, and who was giving up the hope of ever making the fortune he had longed for, and which he had come so far to seek. And yet this was not the case, for as he neared the first huts of the settlement, and an old miner called out to ask him how he had done that day, his answer was a favourable one. 'Very fair,' he said; 'the claim is not near worked out yet.'

'Lucky dog!' ejaculated the old miner as he watched the retreating figure; 'he's got the best claim in the valley, and he and his partner must be making their pile quicker than any of us.'

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But he doesn't seem to care a bit. There he is, going away from work earlier than any of them, and leaving gold behind him only waiting to be picked up. He's a queer fish! I believe he's going straight to that poor, dying lad over at Bowen's. He's been awfully good to him, I hear.'

As the 'lucky dog' threaded his way between the huts he might have been heard to mutter under his breath: 'What good is it all to me? I don't want it, and yet it comes to me unsought when all those poor wretches would sell their very souls for it if they could!' He gave a bitter laugh. 'Perhaps I *have* sold my soul too, not for gold, but for other things just as worthless.'

He paused as he passed the rough shed that did duty as a store, and which was filled with the miscellaneous articles likely to be wanted by the community of miners, and, taking a small bag of gold dust from his pocket, he went inside.

'I want some more of those oranges,' he said—
'the best ones.'

'They're dearer now,' remarked the storekeeper;
'I can't get any more.'

‘What does that matter? What’s the use of money except for buying what you want?’ was the somewhat surly answer.

‘Ah, you’re one of the fortunate ones who pick up gold by the handful whenever you wish. No wonder you don’t have to think twice before you get anything!’

The man took up the oranges in silence, and was leaving the store, when he caught sight of a bunch of flowers on the counter. ‘How much will you sell that for?’ he said.

‘You can have that for nothing, and welcome,’ the storekeeper answered. ‘My wife sowed a few seeds behind our house, and they’ve come up fairly. I guess you’re taking them to the poor lad yonder. I’m afraid he’s in a very bad way.’

The man replied by a nod, took up the flowers gratefully, and went out. He could not have spoken at that moment even if he had tried.

There were some sweet peas in the bunch of flowers—and it was Jack.

He took a short turn among the hillocks before he pursued his way to the sick lad’s door. Those sweet peas had utterly undone him. It

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was almost more than he could bear. He had been trying to banish the past from his mind, until only a dull ache remained, but the sight of those flowers had roused him to an agony of pain.

‘Kitty! Kitty!’ he repeated to himself again and again. ‘My flower—my little flower that God gave me, and that I used so roughly! ‘Oh, if only I could live my life over again, how different it would all be!’

He paced backward and forward among the low bushes and coarse grass that clothed the sides of the valley, not knowing what he did, until his solitude was broken by the sound of the miners’ voices, returning from their work. He sat down for a moment on a rock, and taking out his pocket-book, he slowly placed in it two or three of the sweet-pea blossoms, handling them with reverent care. Then, raising the bag of oranges from the ground, on which he had placed them, he walked rapidly towards the hut to which his steps had been first directed.

As he entered the open door a weak voice greeted him: ‘You are late to-day, Jack; have you had good luck at the diggings?’

Jack sat down on the edge of the bed, and looked at the dying boy's face. The least experienced nurse could have told that the end was not far off, but, in spite of its pinched look, a happy smile played about the lips, and there was a bright light in the sunken eyes.

It was that smile that had first drawn Jack to him—something in it reminded him of Kitty. His hair, too, was the same soft shade when the sun fell upon it, and there was a look in his eyes that seemed able to see things invisible, as Kitty sometimes did.

‘Has the day been very long to you, Charlie?’ asked Jack.

‘I’ve been coughing a good deal to-day, and that tires me rather; but Bowen pulled my bed near the window this morning before he went out, and so I have been able to see what was going on outside.’

‘There’s not much goes on in the daytime, Charlie, when everyone is away at the mines, though rather too much generally goes on at night. What a rowdy set those fellows are!’

‘I’ve had rather nice thoughts to-day, Jack, especially when the sun was going down. The

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huts of the miners looked so mean and poor and neglected, and it gave me quite a pain to think how, night after night, they are full of noise and drunkenness and wickedness; and then I looked up to the sky, and it was all golden, with lovely little red clouds floating about, just where the sun was sinking, and it seemed like the gates of heaven to me. It was so pure and high and holy, and so *very* far above this dreadful place, with its wretchedness and sin. It was like another world altogether, Jack, and I could not help being glad that those golden gates are to open so soon to me, that I may enter in.'

'And leave me and all those poor wretches outside in the dark, Charlie,' said Jack.

Charlie laid his thin, wasted hand upon Jack's knee, and said quickly: 'No, Jack; you know I didn't mean that. It's so strange to me that *everyone* doesn't long to enter in when they know the way is open to them all.'

'I used to know my Bible pretty well, lad,' replied Jack; 'and there is a verse in the book of Revelation that puts a bolt on that gate for most of us: "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth."'

‘But, Jack,’ said Charlie eagerly, ‘the hand of Jesus can pull that bolt back for all those who come and ask Him. After He had died for the sins of the whole world upon the cross He entered through those golden gates, now to appear in the presence of God for us, and He is waiting to open the gate wide to everyone who believes in Him, however bad they are, if they only come to Him for cleansing and forgiveness. Don’t you remember, the very people we are told of in that book of the Revelation who are inside the gates are those who *have* sinned, but whose robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore they are before the throne of God.’

Charlie sank back, exhausted with the fatigue of so much speaking, but his eager look and tone touched Jack to the heart. How anxious he was that Jack should enter the gate of everlasting life! How simple it all seemed to him, and how easy! The verse came into Jack’s mind: ‘Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God.’

Jack knew it was true; he knew he had tried his own way; and even in this short life down

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here he had failed utterly. How could he ever put up a presumptuous hand, and try to draw back for himself that bolt which seemed to shut him out of heaven? He had thought himself so strong, and he had proved himself, oh ! so weak, even in the affairs of this world. Had God cast him out from all joy for ever because of his unworthiness and sin?

Charlie took up a little text-book that lay on the chair beside him, and read a verse from it: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

He did not speak after he had read it, but lay still upon his pillow.

A strange feeling crept into Jack's heart—a feeling as if some inward eyes had been opened in his soul, as if he suddenly saw into another world, with a clearer, purer atmosphere, in which things stood in a truer relation to each other than they had ever done before.

Could it really be this? Had he been going on a wrong tack the whole time? Did it simply mean that he had only to recognise his utter unworthiness and weakness as great facts, not

to be disputed or ignored, and to accept his position before God as absolutely helpless, casting himself entirely on God for pardon, and for all else besides? Was this what it meant when it said that only those who became as little children could enter the kingdom of heaven? What an absolute reversing it was of all his former ideas!

And yet a voice within him seemed to witness that it was true. How else could it be? How else could sinful man become holy, how else could weakness become strength, except by a Mighty Power from without laying hold upon the whole nature, lifting the man out of himself, pardoning and cleansing him from the guilt of the past, and bestowing on him a new life that was not from beneath but from above? How much grander and freer it seemed to him than the weak life he had been leading—and yet he had been so proud of it! He could not bear to think of it now.

He cast himself on his knees by Charlie's bed, and, covering his face with his hands, he prayed: 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

As he knelt there he heard Charlie's voice. There was something wonderfully pure and un-

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earthly in it as it slowly repeated that hymn which, of all others, breathes the desire of the penitent heart to God :

‘Just as I am—without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot ;
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve ;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come.’

As Charlie’s voice ceased Jack took up the words in broken tones : ‘Just as I am ! O Lamb of God, I come ! I can do nothing else, for I am lost and helpless and sinful. Receive me, O my Saviour, I beseech Thee—just as I am.’

The words old Micky had repeated to him in his hour of darkness seemed all at once to fall upon his ear like a burst of music, they brought such joy and relief to his burdened heart, as if Jesus himself were speaking to his soul : ‘Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.’

It was Charlie's voice, ringing out strong and triumphant, and Jack looked up in surprise. The lad's eyes were fixed on the golden glory in the west; but it was not upon the earthly brightness that he gazed: surely he saw the King of Glory himself standing there, with His pierced hand upon the golden gates, ready to throw them open wide to welcome the trusting soul.

As Jack watched him the light faded from the eager, waiting eyes, and he knew Charlie had passed through those gates into the presence of the King.

As he rose from his knees, with a strange, deep peace in his heart, he said aloud: 'Surely this place is holy ground.' He did not wonder now at Charlie's restful assurance and joyful hope. He knew that he might trust the promise of His Saviour, for it was He who had spoken to his soul, and that, as he had thrown himself upon Him, according to His own command, so he might rest upon His Almighty Power and unchanging Faithfulness to keep him unto the end.

As he read his Bible that night, for the first time for many months, he pondered long and

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thankfully upon the words that now came to him with a new force and meaning: 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'

CHAPTER XIX

HOME ONCE MORE

JACK and Bowen had to dig Charlie's grave themselves, and Jack read the beautiful words of the Burial Service as they laid his poor body to rest in that far-off land. He had never realised the grandeur of those glorious words, 'In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, until now that he knew what it was to possess that hope for himself; and though he missed Charlie much, he could not grieve for him, knowing that he was with the Lord.

After their task was finished, and Bowen had gone away, Jack remained behind. He sought for some of the wild flowers that grew among the rocks around the place, and planted them upon the grave. He had carved a rough headstone to mark the spot, with Charlie's name and the date, and underneath the words: 'I will in no wise cast out.'

He sat down beside the newly-made mound,

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and took out his Bible. He felt as if it were Sunday. A still solemnity seemed to reign in the air, and the presence of God seemed very near. He turned to the book of the Revelation, and read all that he could find about that Holy City to which his friend had gone. As he read he felt like Bunyan when, in his dream, he saw the gates of the City open to let the pilgrims in: he wished himself among them.

He heard the shouts of the miners as they returned from their work, to spend the evening, as usual, in wild revel, and the contrast of that ungodly, reckless crew with the stillness and calm of the quiet dead struck him painfully. He now wondered, as Charlie had done, how any man could deliberately choose an evil, God-forsaken life when such depths of joy and strength and hope might be his just for the taking. And yet, only a day or two ago, he had been among them, with his eyes closed, as theirs still were, to the wonders of that truer, higher, happier life which could be lived in the love and strength of God.

What a fool he had been all along; how wilful and how obstinate; and how good God was not to leave him alone in his self-will. His heart was

filled with thankfulness to his Redeemer, but at the same time it ached with the thought of how he had caused others to suffer by his sin. What pain he must have given to his dear wife over and over again, and how she must have grieved about him, with his hard, self-righteous spirit, knowing as she did what the true Christian life should be. Her life had, indeed, witnessed for Christ in all things; how patient and bright and humble and good she had been, never complaining, and never preaching, but consistent always in her loving, gentle ways. Oh, if he had only realised before what a beautiful thing he was overlooking and neglecting in his selfish blindness! He had so often pained that Christ-like spirit, and at last he had been the means of casting her away from him. His old, sad cry rose again from his heart: 'I wasn't worthy! I wasn't worthy!' It was a comfort to him to feel so sure that she would forgive him all, if she knew—'just like her Master had done,' he said. But he wished he could have heard the assurance from her own dear lips.

Since Charlie's death Jack had felt strongly that he could no longer remain in the miners' camp. It was a hardening and an evil thing, as

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he saw it, this search for gold; it seemed to bring out some of the worst features in a man's character, and deadened all desire for good. A strong feeling had been borne in upon him that he ought to return to Fairbrook Farm. It would be misery to him in many ways, he knew, but God would help him. It was just shirking his duty if he remained away. God had left his little boy to him, and he must do his best by him, both temporally and spiritually. The farm ought to be kept up for his sake, and surely it was a father's part to do all he could for his motherless child. He had been very successful in his undertakings since he had come to Grizzly Bear Gulch, and after he had sold his share of the claim he would be able to take back a good sum, to use for the benefit of his little son. Jack felt a ray of comfort come to him as he thought of this one object in life being still left to him, and he determined to start off at once on his return to the farm—he could not yet call it home.

It was a long journey from that far western valley to the edge of the forest where the little log-house stood. But the whole of the way back Jack felt that the presence of God was with him, and

that He approved of the resolution he had taken.

It was after many a weary day's tramp that at last Jack reached the railway, and was able to exchange his hitherto slow rate of progress for the speed of the train. He could not help feeling sorry when the time came for him to leave the solitude of the hills and he had again to mingle in the bustle of life. He had not taken his ticket to One Fir Siding, as he shrank from the thought of meeting all his old acquaintances, but determined to get out at a station lower down the line, and walk quietly to the farm by another way.

As he drew nearer to the familiar place, and recognised the old landmarks, the strain upon his feelings grew more and more intense. When at length he reached the spot whence he knew that in a moment he would catch the first glimpse of the house his strength of mind failed him.

He turned aside, and sat down among a little group of trees by the wayside to gain a few moments' respite.

How could he go on? That house without Kitty was like a body without a soul, and he felt he could not bear to look upon it. How empty it

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would all be! And it might have been so happy still! Oh, that he could recall those last hasty, cruel words of his, and blot them out of his memory! He knew they had been blotted out of the Book of God for the sake of his crucified Saviour, but they were still printed in letters of fire upon his own soul. How thankful he was that he had waved to her that last day! The remembrance of her standing in the doorway came to him like a healing balm. He knew that, though her eyes must have been sad, there were depths of love in them, even though he had wounded her. Well, he must not let himself get weak in this way, or he would never get on at all! With a short, earnest prayer to God to give him strength and comfort he rose from his seat, and walked bravely round the bend in the road.

What was that at the cottage door?

A woman, with a print dress and a white apron! It gave him quite a turn, it looked so like Kitty.

He had, instinctively, almost lifted his cap, and waved to her, but his arm dropped again to his side. Of course, it wasn't her. Probably it was some woman who had been sent there to look

after Johnnie. And yet, could his eyes deceive him even at this distance? Why, she was waving to him just as she always did! He raised his arm, and waved in reply.

In an instant the cottage door was empty, and the slender figure in the print dress was flying down the path towards the brook.

How he joined her there he never knew; his feet seemed to him to have wings; but in a few moments more he was holding Kitty in his arms, showering passionate kisses on her upturned face.

‘Thank God! Oh, thank God! My precious darling!’

His brain almost reeled in the greatness and ecstasy of his joy. To feel her in his arms, to touch her, to look into her dear, deep eyes again—what happiness it was after all the long and awful agony of the past!

What they said to one another those first few moments cannot be set down here; indeed, it is doubtful if they could have told it themselves. They only knew this, that their souls had again mingled after having been severed for so long, and their love seemed to envelop them as in a golden mist.

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This at least Jack realised that, as he walked up the path towards the house, and he could look down at his wife clinging to his side, and feel her slight form within the circle of his protecting arm, the world seemed suddenly to have become wonderfully beautiful, and life opened out into a bright vista of light and joy.

And Kitty? She certainly could not have told anyone what her feelings were. Her whole being seemed to be in one great whirl of absolute bliss, of which the centre and the pivot and the circumference was 'Jack.'

How can that first evening be adequately described? Jack had to admire the children, especially baby Gracie, who had been such a little thing when he last saw her, and to congratulate Kitty and old Micky on the splendid way in which they had kept everything going at the farm. Trusty also came in for a good share of notice; and as Kitty told him what a comfort he had been to her, Jack patted his head gratefully, saying: 'Good, faithful old dog, you never did a better day's work than when you ran away from me and the bullocks.'

Johnnie was very pleased to see his father again,

and at once proceeded to hunt his pocket for the accustomed treasures.

‘Not to-day, little man,’ Jack said, laughing. ‘I’ll promise you that you’ll find something next time I come home.’

When they all sat down to a happy, cheerful meal in the comfortable kitchen Kitty noticed the earnest, heartfelt tone in which Jack asked a blessing and thanked God for all His great mercies to them ; and later, when Micky had gone out, and the children were in bed, husband and wife sat down, side by side, to have a quiet talk together.

There was much to tell and much to hear. Jack did not try to keep back anything, but bravely told Kitty all. He did not spare himself, but laid bare his past life, in all its pride and self-will, until loyal Kitty begged him not to blame himself so unmercifully, feeling that she could hardly bear to hear such condemnation of him even from himself.

‘Jack dear, I can’t bear to hear you speak like that,’ she said. ‘Don’t let us talk about it any more. I can only remember the happy things to-day ; and if there was anything unpleasant we

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must just forget all about it, and begin again now, happier than ever.'

'So we shall, Kitty, thank God, for I have learnt now where to go for help. God has been teaching me deep things since you went away. I found my Saviour in the wilderness, Kitty, or, rather, He found me, and when I came to Him, in my wretchedness and sin, He did not cast me out, although I deserved it, if ever a man did.'

And then Jack told her about Charlie, and how he had reminded him of her. He told her of the lad's simple faith and earnest spirit, and how it was beside his dying bed that he first found peace for his sin-tossed soul.

'I wish you had known him, Kitty,' he said; 'you would have had just the same sort of thoughts as he had, and could have helped him. I don't like to think of him dying out there all alone, with only us rough men to care for him. But he didn't feel that: he was an orphan, and had been cast upon the world to do the best he could for himself, so he had learnt to look only to God.'

Then Kitty had to tell Jack all she had gone through. As she described her lonely wanderings

through the snowy forest Jack shivered as he thought of what she had escaped, and he had to put out his hand to touch her again to make sure he was not dreaming, but that it was really true that she was sitting there by his side. He seemed to live with her through those long months by the frozen lake as she told about her life among the Indians, and he thanked God with her for having provided so wonderfully for her need.

Of course, he had to hear about the Bents, and their good friends the Manlys, and, best of all, about Phil.

‘How wonderful it all is,’ he said, ‘and how very good God has been to us all! Kitty, you must help me to show Him by my life how grateful I am to Him.’

‘We shall serve Him together,’ said Kitty, looking up at Jack with glowing eyes, ‘and He will help us both to do His will. Jack, let us ask Him now.’

CHAPTER XX

CHRISTMAS AGAIN

FIVE years had passed away, and it was again Christmas Day at Fairbrook Farm.

But it was a very different Fairbrook Farm from the one to which Kitty was introduced that first summer after her marriage. To begin with, Kitty's family had outgrown the little log-house with the shingle roof, two more babies having made their appearance since we last saw her. A larger and better house had been built very near the old one: it was also of wood, but altogether more comfortable and convenient. Kitty had planted pretty creepers against its walls, which, Jack said, made it look much more like home. There was not much to be seen of the creepers at this winter season, but there was no doubt that it looked a very pleasant home in spite of that. There were warm red curtains in the windows, and a long curl of blue smoke from the chimney told of warmth and heat within. The old log-house had been

given over to Micky and the two men who helped Jack with the farm ; and instead of the small temporary sheds that formerly surrounded the yard there were good substantial out-houses and stables, well ordered and well stocked. One of Mrs Tims' elder girls now helped Kitty with the children, the larger house and growing family having greatly increased Kitty's already multitudinous duties.

Jack had broken up new land each year, and the rich harvests amply repaid him for his labour. A small sawmill had also been erected farther down the stream. It was always kept well employed ; for there was plenty of demand for sawn timber in the more open country round One Fir Siding, where the farms were multiplying, and houses being built every year. So the little brook was called to lend its aid, and the waterfall below the bridge was utilised to turn the big wooden wheel of the new mill.

A very favourite haunt this was of little Johnnie and his inseparable companion, Bobby Bent. After Jack returned home he had suggested that Mr Bent should take the next allotment to Fairbrook Farm, which had been done, and both Mr and

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Mrs Bent were thoroughly satisfied with their experiment. A nice little house had been built not far off, over which Mrs Bent reigned in happy content; while log-cabins for the saw-miller and his family, and one or two other labourers, had sprung up near by, changing the aspect of the once isolated farmstead into a cheerful and prosperous little colony.

Bobby Bent still retained his old reputation for getting into mischief and as cleverly getting himself out of it again. Kitty sometimes wondered if she were altogether wise in allowing Johnnie to go about so much with such a madcap companion; but it was wonderful how little harm they came to, and though Bobby never thought of avoiding danger himself he was always most careful where Johnnie was concerned. Everyone loved the wild little pair, and, go where they would, they were welcome.

After the sawmill, their most frequent resort was old Micky's store. The old man had become very feeble these last years, and the work at the farm was too heavy for him, so Jack and Kitty had built a wooden shed for him, past which the farmers went with the sawn timber, and fitted it

up with shelves and counter, where he could display his small stock of goods to the best advantage. No grand plate-glass window in a fashionable thoroughfare was ever arranged with more pains and thought than was Micky's humble casement. In this he was always enthusiastically aided by Bobby and Johnnie. They would take it in turns to stand outside to note the effect and direct the operations ; while the other arranged the window from inside, Micky supplying the miscellaneous wares, which were the pride of the whole three. Bootlaces and hanks of darning cotton were hung in graceful festoons over pyramids of candles and soap, surrounding a centre-piece which consisted of a pair of boots or a saucepan or an ink-bottle, as their fancy might suggest ; while the corners would be filled up with gorgeous handkerchiefs of startlingly gay colours, or perhaps bottles of sweets of equally crude colouring and varied hue—buttons, pencils, match-boxes, clay pipes, and numerous other small articles being finally strewn about with a liberal hand as a finishing touch to the enticing whole.

On this Christmas morning there was great stir and bustle in the little colony, and especially in

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the house with the red curtains. Mr and Mrs Manly had arrived the evening before as welcome guests. It was the first time they had come to spend Christmas at Fairbrook Farm, Jack and Kitty having always gone to them for that festive season. At ten o'clock there was a general gathering of nearly the whole community in the large kitchen, several neighbours and their wives driving in from outlying farms to join in the hearty service and the bright singing. Every Sunday Jack arranged for a similar meeting, which was much valued, and well attended by many who had been for long utterly cut off from any means of grace. As the visitors drove away, shouting back words of cheer to the genial master of the house, it was easy to see that he had won a position of affectionate regard in the hearts of all.

When the sound of the last jingling sleigh bell had died away in the still frosty air, a spirit of unwonted energy seemed suddenly to seize Kitty and her companions.

'I think I'd better make myself scarce,' said Jack, laughing; 'I'm only in the way here!'

'Yes, Jack; it's the wisest thing you can do,' rejoined Kitty. 'You might just go and ask old

Micky if he happens to have any more of those big red apples. I gave some to poor Mrs Hunt to take back to her sick boy, and I haven't got quite enough left.'

Jack went off, whistling, and the three women proceeded to work. The extra forms were carried out of the kitchen, and the floor well brushed, a spotlessly white cloth was placed on the large, roomy table, and out of the larders and cupboards appeared Christmas cheer, plentiful and good.

Mrs Manly had brought a large cake, crammed with currants and covered with icing, which had given her many anxious moments until she lifted it unharmed out of the sleigh and gave it into Kitty's keeping. 'A Happy Christmas' was written on it in coloured comfits, and a circle of preserved cherries made a little fence round the edge.

It was a happy and united party that sat down round the well-laden table that Christmas Day. Mr and Mrs Bent were there, and old Micky, with the youngest little girl upon his knee. 'Spring and winter,' he said it was, as his snow-white beard mingled with the golden curls of

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the little one. Bobbie and Johnnie were seated together as usual, having taken up their position as near as possible to the dish of red apples. Every face was bright and cheerful, and, as Mrs Manly remarked, she did not think a happier Christmas party could be found on either side of the Atlantic Ocean.

‘That reminds me that I had a letter from Bessy last week,’ said Kitty. ‘She gave me such a lot of news from the old country. She and Philip are so very happy together.’

‘I am glad Phil has found such a good wife,’ returned Mrs Manly. ‘He needed one, for he was not very strong, and a man wants someone to look after him.’

‘He’s got a good situation as gamekeeper,’ said Jack, ‘and likes his work. He was always happy with a gun in his hand. The open-air life ought to suit him well.’

‘Did I tell you they had gone to live in the dear old cottage by the brook?’ asked Kitty. ‘Jim was offered the bailiff’s place at the Squire’s, and as a nice large house always goes with the situation, of course he had to leave the old home. It was really far too small for such

a large family ; but I'm very glad it doesn't go to strangers. It is delightful to think of Phil and Bessy there.'

'He wrote such a nice letter to me just before his marriage,' said Mrs Manly, 'and he said it was such a comfort to think that he and Bessy were so at one in all things.'

'Bessy has also learnt she can't do without God,' said Jack. 'It is strange what a long time some of us take before we learn that lesson. I know I needed hard discipline before I found out its truth. When I think to what depths God had to bring me before I humbled myself before Him it makes me almost tremble.'

'I know all that dreadful winter taught me many things,' said Kitty. 'It seemed so dark at the time, but it was all leading to light. It has made me feel more than ever that I can surely trust God to guide us, for He can make *all* things work together for good to those who love Him. Jack and I were just saying the other day that we wouldn't have missed that time for anything, awful though it was. Our home would never have been the beautiful,

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happy place it is now if it hadn't been for all that loving guidance and patient teaching.'

'Well, I'm sure you're right in saying it's a happy home,' chimed in Mrs Bent emphatically. 'It does one good only to come in at the door: there's always a feeling of peace in the house, and joy too. I often say to my husband I wish I had your secret for always keeping good-tempered and happy in spite of everything.'

'There's our only secret,' said Jack, pointing to the text with the silver letters, which had been brought over from the old log-house, and hung in a nice frame above the mantelpiece. 'But it's no secret. We hang it up there so that everyone can see it. Get up, and read it, Johnnie, though I don't think you'll need to look very close you know it so well by heart.'

Johnnie got up, and repeated the familiar words :

'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.'

'Do you remember, Mrs Manly, when you tried to persuade me that I couldn't do without God—that summer just after Johnnie was born? I

tried to, but I found it wouldn't do. Sooner or later a man finds out his mistake, and well for him if it's in time—before he's gone too far.'

'To leave God out of your life is to leave out all that's best worth having,' said Manly quietly.

'Yes,' replied Kitty. 'I always think God's presence with us is like a golden light that shines upon everything, and makes even the little, trivial things beautiful and the difficult things clear. It seems so safe, too, when you know it is actually God who is building up your whole life day by day, and planning it out, and watching over you, so that no harm shall come to you.'

'And yet how many try to work out their whole life by themselves,' said Mrs Manly. 'No wonder there are such sad mistakes and so many spoiled lives. Surely it is wiser and safer to trust them to God!'

Kitty looked across at Jack with kindling eyes. 'God has made our lives wonderfully happy,' she said.

'When I think of all the way the Lord has led me,' said Jack earnestly, 'and of all His wonderful loving-kindness and long patience, and of how He

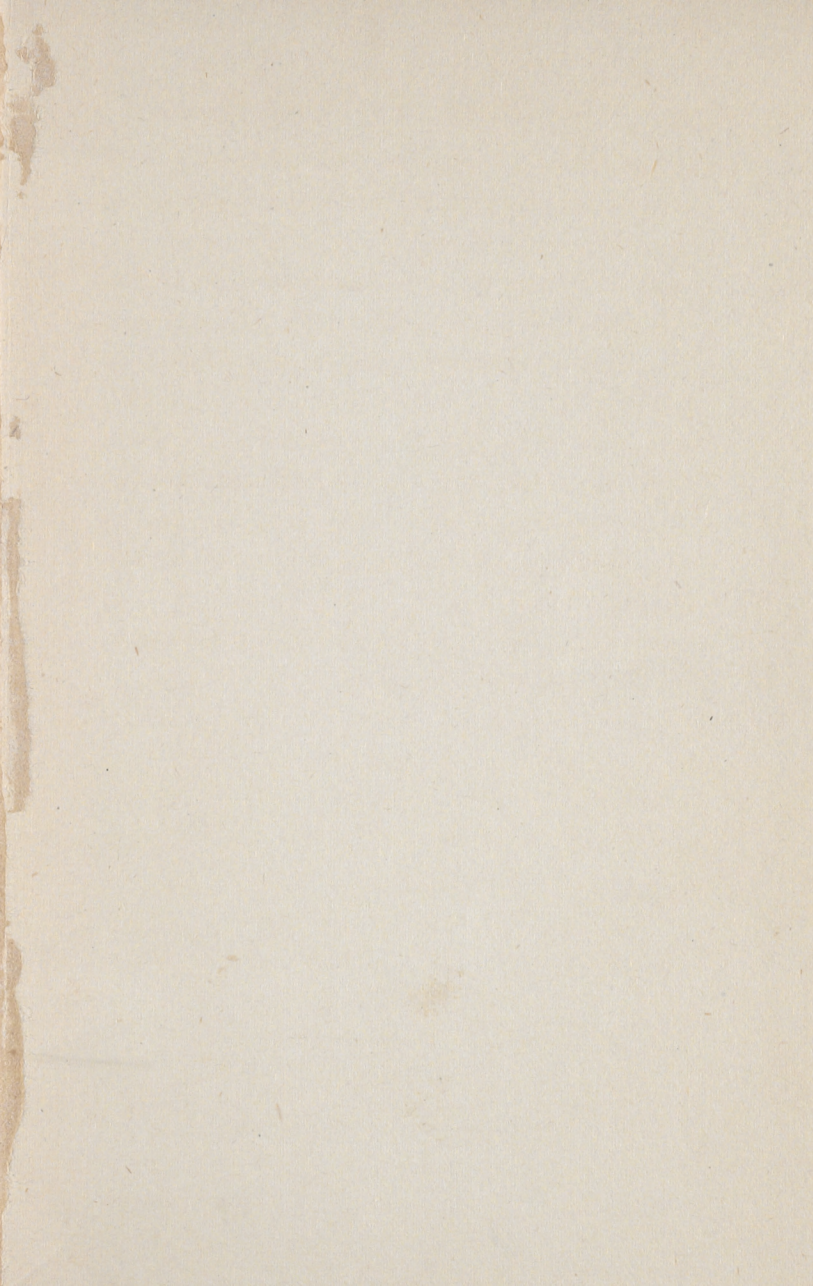
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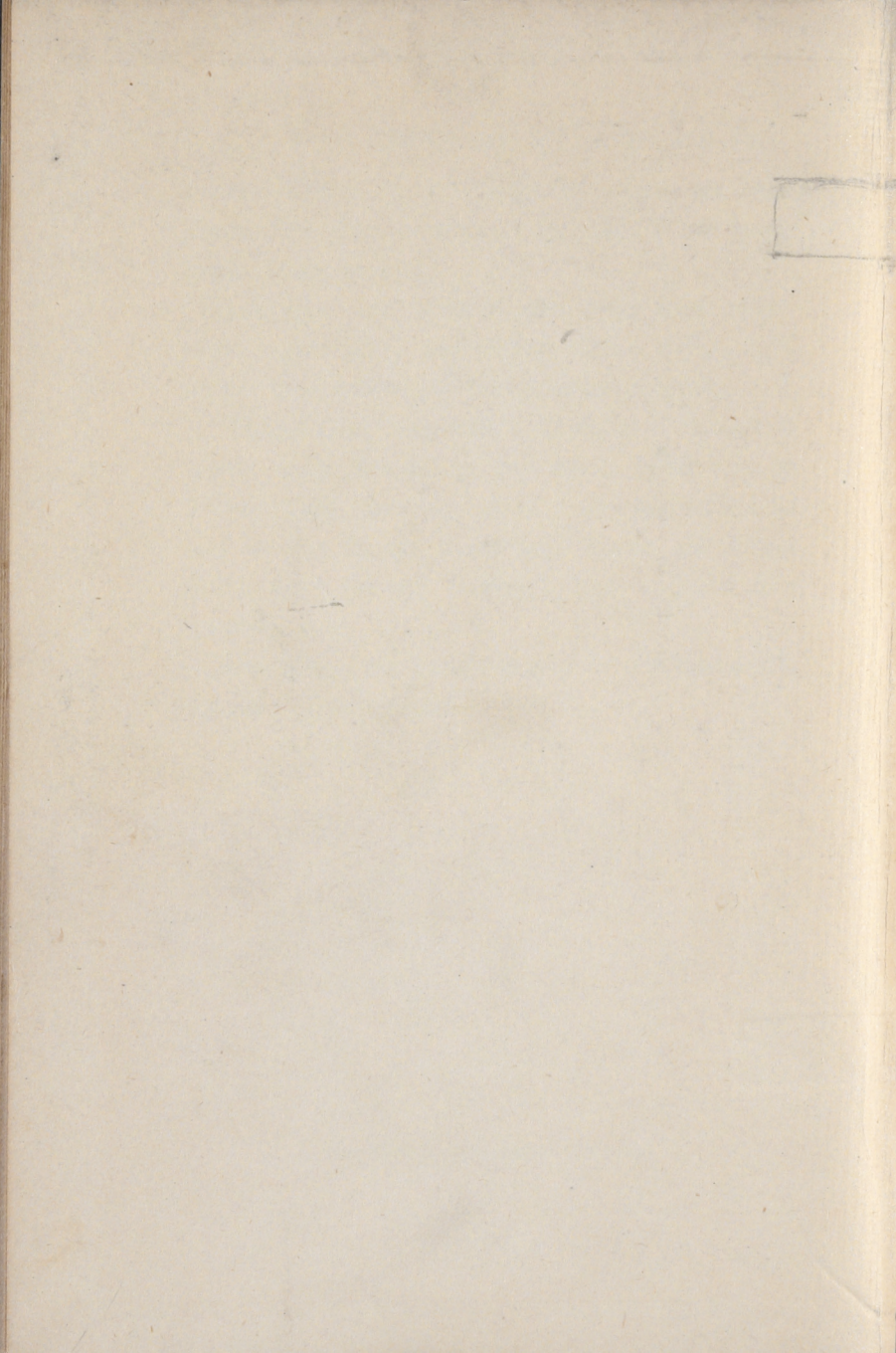
watched over us and kept us when we were absent one from another, I feel that I can never praise Him enough.'

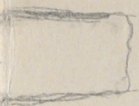
Jack rose, and went to the other end of the table, where Kitty was sitting with a happy light on her face, and kissed her almost reverently.

'Thank God!' he said. 'I feel as if those two words were just filling my whole heart to-day. Thank God for my dear wife and children and for my happy home and, above all things, thank God for my Saviour's love and for His watchful care.'

And Kitty, her hand clasped in her husband's, echoed: 'Thank God!'







N.L.C. - B.N.C.



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